

THIS WEEK'S NOVELETTE IS OF ENTRANCING INTEREST.

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"DOLORES, DO YOU BELIEVE IN SECOND LOVE" LORD CARLTON SAID, WITH SUDDEN FEELING.

ON CHRISTMAS EVE

[A NOVELETTE]

COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.

FAIRIES are out of date—those marvellous godmothers who worked such wonders for their favourites. Those mischievous elves, who interfered so persistently in the family arrangements are unheard of to-day, or else everyone would have declared that Dolores Fane must have been a changeling. As this explanation of the young lady's peculiarities was denied them they simply

shrugged their shoulders and wondered how the dear Rector and Mrs. Fane *could* have come by such a daughter.

How the Rev. Lawrence and Mrs. Fane *could* have had a daughter like Dolores baffled comprehension. When she came to Mitford, a child of ten, she was the most mischievous imp in the Sunday School, and was sent home from it in disgrace so often that at last her mother declared it was no use dressing her for the purpose of attending it.

She was sent daily to Miss Grant's establishment for young ladies, but played truant so often the Rector doubted if she had enough instruction to be worth the school bill.

For three months she ran wild at home, while her mother attempted to teach her; but poor

Mrs. Fane had so many other duties that Dolores managed to evade all regular lessons, and she might have grown up the veriest ignoramus ever known but for a happy chance which befell her.

She was always wandering about, and being, after all, only a child, it happened that one day she lost her way, and actually wandered into Mereham, where she was discovered in the Cathedral joining in the service and singing the anthem as sweetly as a chorister. A lady, struck by the wonderful voice, and amazed at the dusty little shoes, barehead, and soiled pinafore (Dolores had been wandering about since the morning, and had lost her hat), followed her out of the Cathedral and began to talk to her.

CHRISTMAS PRESENTS FOR ALL. SEE PAGE 287.

Miss Fane had no shyness, and, it must be confessed, no shame. She told her listener quaintly she was a bad girl, and would never come to any good (her father's phrase, and repeated with a perfect imitation of his voice and manner); she was even too wicked for Miss Grant to teach her any longer. She wasn't sorry. Miss Grant had so many boys, and they were always in the way.

Dolores' new friend was the proprietress of Meresham House, a woman already comfortably off, and whose school increased every year. Whether it was the charm of Dolores' smile, or the thought of getting a victory over Miss Grant (who had once been a teacher at Meresham House, and yet had dared to start in humble opposition not five miles off), or perhaps pure womanly compassion for the lonely child, Mrs. Trafford drove Dolores home in her own phaeton, and had an interview with the Rector, at which she offered to educate his little girl free of all charge as a boarder at Meresham House.

For seven years Miss Fane spent nine months out of every twelve away from home. At last a day came when Mrs. Trafford confessed she knew as much as the establishment could teach her. She would willingly have obtained a situation as governess for her favourite; but, alas! Dolores was a beauty, and her manners had none of the dignity and firmness which might have got over this objection. She could not be retained as teacher in a school where all the girls regarded her as the ringleader of their amusements. There was nothing for it but to send her home, where, as her kind friend hoped, she might be of use to her overworked mother.

It is rather a humiliating thing to confess of one's heroine, but at Mitford Rectory Dolores proved a complete failure.

The Rector thought so accomplished a girl might save them the salary of a schoolmistress and teach the village children; so Dolores was sent every day to be initiated in her duties by Miss Bolt, the retiring mistress.

But the children would not agree. They adored their sister as a playfellow, but would not submit to her in any other capacity.

Dolores then tried to make the family's dresses; but, alas! she always used twice as much stuff as her mother thought necessary, besides imparting a hopelessly worldly look to the little garments.

Then, as though purposely to give her a last chance of being useful, the organist died; and Dolores, of her own accord, volunteered to replace him.

Here, at least, no fault could be found with her. She played magnificently; indeed her music, as Mr. Fane said, was far too good for a village church.

Dolores had left school more than a year at this particular Christmastide we are going to tell of. She had quite settled down as organist to her father, and as a subject for wonder to his parishioners.

No one actually disliked her, she was too sweet-tempered; but certainly more than three-fourths of her acquaintance disapproved of her. She was so useless, so romantic, and such a coquette. The last charge was strenuously denied by her friends.

Dolores was the prettiest girl in the neighbourhood, and it was not her fault if the young men liked to talk to her.

It was Christmas time. Dolores had been practising for the extra services, and had forgotten the time till reminded of it by the gathering gloom. Then she looked the organ, dismissed the little boy who acted as blower, and went leisurely down the steps that led from the organ-loft into the church.

It was her birthday. She was just nineteen; and Dolores, though usually the gayest and most light-hearted of human creatures, felt sad.

Nineteen! Just the age when other girls were enjoying their fill of pleasure and gaiety; but for her there was no chance of either. Look-

ing forward she could see nothing bright or attractive in her lot.

Dolores Fane at this time was that charming combination, half girl, half woman. Her figure was slight and graceful even in her home-made cloth mantle, but her face disarmed criticism, and those who looked at it once only wanted to look again.

Her eyes themselves were large and lustrous, with dark brows and long lashes, which looked almost black, as they rested against her fair cheek. She was almost too pale, but exercise or excitement always gave her a brilliant colour, and there was nothing sickly or unhealthy in her complexion. Her hair, in spite of those dark eyes and lashes, was fair, beautiful soft brown hair, which glistened like pure gold in the sunshine.

She closed the heavy oak door, and had just turned the key, when she became aware that someone was waiting for her. On the rustic seat in the porch sat a young man, who rose as Dolores came towards him, took both her hands in his, and asked, a little gravely:

"Do you know me, Dolly?"

"It's dear old Geoff!"

Rather a familiar greeting for a young lady of nineteen to give to a stranger who is of no kin to her; but the friendship which united Dolores Fane and Geoffrey Dean was of no common kind.

She blushed crimson; but Sir Geoffrey did not seem at all inclined to resent the liberty.

"You are not changed at all, Dolly. I should have known you anywhere!"

"Mitford life is not calculated to change one," said Miss Fane, demurely. "Its tendency is rather to fossilize. Some take longer and some shorter to become fossils; but how in the world did you come here?"

"I drove over from the Court; it's only seven miles, you know. The mother wouldn't let May come because there's an east wind. I've been to the Rectory, and Mrs. Fane said I should find you here."

"And I thought you were in Italy!"

"We have been in England since the spring, and had to visit all our relations in the autumn. Positively this is the first time we have been at the Court for five long years."

"And May is quite well?"

"She is much better. She thinks you very hard-hearted for not writing to her."

"I thought she had forgotten me!"

"We have none of us done that. Don't you want to know what I came to Mitford for?"

"To see me!"

"To bring a message from my mother to Mrs. Fane. We want you to help us to keep Christmas at the Court. Mother said I was not to come back without you."

"Me!" said Dolores, most ungrammatically. "Oh, Sir Geoffrey, are you quite sure? But it's no use, mother never would say yes!"

"She has said it," returned Geoffrey, though I confess it was an awful struggle to get her to. For one whole hour, Miss Dolores, did I sit trying to convert her and the Rector to my views. It was a tough bit of work."

"What did they say?"

"The organ was the first difficulty; but a friend of mine from Meresham will be very happy to take the services, so I got over that!"

He did not think it necessary to tell Dolores the "friend" was a struggling young musician who would have been thankful to come much further than Mitford for two guineas a week, and the loan of a horse from Sir Geoffrey's stable.

"And then?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Fane seem to think Dean Court a very wicked place, and that the levity of your disposition rendered it peculiarly unfit for you. I declared my cousin, a clergyman, was there, and I would request him to attempt your reformation; but it was hard work. Still, I won the day. Your mother and

Jane are packing a box, and I am to have the pleasure of driving you home with me."

For one moment Dolores was happy—then a fear assailed her. May Dean had loved her dearly. For four years they had been as sisters, but they had now been parted for an even longer time than that of their friendship. What if May had changed? She had been to most of the celebrated places in southern Europe. She might look down on her old school friend.

Perhaps Sir Geoffrey thought of the doubts which troubled his companion.

"You will find May just the same," he said, smiling. "I tell her she is a shocking baby for seventeen. Do you know, Dolly, she has a very faithful heart! We have sent a great many young ladies in the last five years, but no one has ever rivalled you!"

"May was always a darling! I do wish she had written; it would have made me glad even to know she was in England!"

"I never kept a secret in my life," said Sir Geoffrey, smiling; "and May will tell you if I don't. She would have written last Easter. The mother wanted Mrs. Fane to spare you to stay with us, but a rumour reached us that your time was otherwise engaged."

"Do you mean the organ?"

"I mean Mr. Banks! Dolly, we all ought to go down on our knees and apologise to you for believing you would take up with such a little snob; but how could we help it? Dr. Melville actually wrote to us that he had the news from Mrs. Fane herself."

"Well," said Dolly, magnanimously, "I suppose you thought mother ought to know. But I couldn't have done it. I almost hate him!"

"Perhaps Mrs. Fane does not share your feelings?"

"She used to have him to tea once a week, and always made a cake. I told her at last it came expensive. Mr. Banks is going to marry Susan Ketch, the pastry-cook's daughter. Their banns were read last Sunday!"

"I know."

"And that brought you here?"

He smiled.

"I never believed the report, Dolly, but the mother did. She seemed to think you capable of sacrificing yourself to your family. I fear my faith in your generosity was not so strong."

They were at the Rectory gates. Mrs. Fane stood on the threshold, the Rector behind her.

"What a time you have been, Dolores! I expect you kept Sir Geoffrey knocking at the church door till he was tired. You forget everything when you're at that organ."

Sir Geoffrey did not explain they had been talking for nearly half-an-hour. He wished Mr. and Mrs. Fane a happy Christmas, shook hands with freckled Jane, helped Dolores into the dog-cart, and drove off with her.

"It is just as though I were a Cinderella," said Dolly, simply, "and you a kind of fairy godfather, if there were ever such things!"

"I am not quite venerable enough," said the Baronet, a little shortly. "How old do you think me?"

"You were grown up when I first knew you," said Dolly, "and that is ages ago. Why, I was nineteen to-day. I feel quite venerable!"

"And I am eight-and-twenty."

"Are you?"

"Does it seem very old to you?"

"I don't know," said Dolores, gravely. "It's different for a man. When I am eight-and-twenty I shall feel all my youth is over."

"Nonsense!"

Another five minutes, and she stood in the well-remembered house. A huge fire burnt in the hall the men-servants made way for a gentlewoman in widow's weeds, and Lady Dean kissed the little ne'er-do-well very warmly.

"Welcome, dear; and a happy Christmas when it comes! Now I must take you to May."

She need not have feared her greeting there.



May flung her arms round Dolores' neck and kissed her. She seemed just the same warm-hearted child who had gone away five years before, and Dolores noticed, with a pang, that she seemed just as delicate.

Lady Dean took Dolores up to her room, which as of old, opened into May's. She made her guest feel thoroughly at home, and left her with the hope she would "try to be happy at the Court."

As she looked round the beautiful room Dolores thought she would have little need of "trying" to fulfil her kind friend's wish. She little guessed what heavy sorrow was really drawing near, and that it would come to her not in her narrow, unlovely home, but amid the beauty and the grandeur, amid the love and tenderness, which surrounded her at the Court.

CHAPTER II.

Two days passed, and Dolores felt quite at home in the beautiful house where she was made so welcome. She was not in the least oppressed by the grandeur and luxury of the Court, but took to both as naturally as though she had never turned dresses and trimmed hats.

The clergyman cousin, whose presence Sir Geoffrey had held out as a bait to Mrs. Fane, proved to be a kind old man, with silvery hair and a benevolent face, whose favourite theory that youth was the time for enjoyment would certainly have scandalised Dolores' parents.

Christmas Eve came at last, cold, bright, and frosty. Sir Geoffrey looked up with pleased surprise from his share of the general correspondence.

"Rex will be here to-night. Only fancy, after his repeated refusals he actually offers us a visit!"

"I shall be delighted to see him!" said Lady Dean, warmly. "You know, Geoff, I don't worship him as you do; but I always feel sorry for him!"

"He has the saddest face I ever saw!" said May, gently. "Do you know, Geoffrey, I am half sorry he has chosen to-night, when there will be a host of strangers?"

Mr. Pemberton looked up quickly. "Is the gentleman a misanthrope that he objects to social gatherings?"

"He has had enough trouble to make him so," replied Sir Geoffrey, gravely. "Surely, Cousin John, you remember the Reginald Carlyon of my college days? We were inseparable friends."

Dolores felt there was a story connected with the expected guest, and after breakfast beguiled May into the conservatory, and begged her to tell her all about Mr. Carlyon.

"Lord Carlyon!" corrected May, gently. "It is almost the saddest story I ever heard; but I would rather you knew it before you saw him."

"I hate people with stories! Did I ever see him, May? Did he come to the Court long ago?"

"He has never been to the Court. He was Geoff's college friend, and he spent Christmas with us in Italy the first winter we went abroad. I was only a child then, Dolores; but I can remember how bright and clever he was. Father was delighted with him. He was the life of the house."

"And he was not Lord Carlyon then?"

"Oh, no! He was only the nephew of the reigning lord. He had two or three hundreds a year; but he was very clever, and meant to be an author. Geoff says his success was certain. He had just left college when he came to us. He is four years older than Geoff."

"And was his book a failure?"

"He never published a book. He was in London writing for the magazines, and beginning already to make a name for himself when he fell in love. I never saw her, but Geoff says she was brilliantly beautiful."

"And she refused him?" interrupted the little *no-r-do-well*. "I don't call that the saddest story I ever heard!"

May smiled.

"Let me finish. She was a penniless governess, and she accepted Rex gladly. Their wedding day was fixed. He accepted a secretaryship, which, with the addition of his earnings by his pen, would provide her with every comfort. Lord Carlyon, who was very fond of Rex, as the bride had no parents, invited her down to Carlyon Manor. He said his wife would choose her trousseau, and he would give her away. The secretaryship took up a great deal of Rex's time. He went down with his *panels* to Carlyon, and left her in his aunt's care while he returned to London. In six weeks' time they were to be married."

"Don't say she died!" pleaded Dolores. "She ought to have lived. She had everything to make her happy—youth, beauty, love—how could she die?"

"She is alive now, dear. When Rex went back to Carlyon it was to find her flown. That very day she had eloped with his cousin, the heir of the manor, and ten thousand a year."

For once Dolores was silent. She no longer complained the story was not sad enough.

"It was an awful blow," went on May, gently. "He threw up everything—literature, position, prospects. He had, I told you, something of his own, and he buried himself in a miserable hut, somewhere near a remote Yorkshire village. He would not see a friend or read a letter. He suffered no human creature to cross his threshold except a deaf and dumb old woman who waited on him. It was a kind of living death."

"I call that cowardly," said Dolores, bluntly. "He ought to have held up his head, and felt such a woman was not worth regrets. Has Sir Geoffrey persuaded him to exchange the hut for the Court by any unknown spell, and do you think he will have forgotten how to talk? He must be rather out of practice."

"You don't understand, Dolly. All I told you happened three years ago. James Carlyon did not enjoy the pleasure of his cruel triumph long. He died within six months of his wedding, and his widow was left utterly unprovided for, at her father-in-law's mercy. The old lord tried to find Rex and induce him to accept a position worthy of his heir, but all inquiries failed. He was broken-hearted at his son's death, and did not survive him a year. Then the executors appealed to Geoffrey as Reginald Carlyon's most intimate friend."

"Geoff knew his address, but was bound by a promise not to divulge it, so he went down to Yorkshire himself and took the news. It seems the poor fellow did not even know of his cousin's death. He would not go to Carlyon, or give a single order respecting the estate. He signed a paper endowing Geoffrey with full power to act for him, and went abroad."

"Then you have never seen him since?"

"Yes. He spent two or three months with us last winter, but he was, oh! so changed. I think Mrs. Carlyon's treachery wrecked his life."

"And he is Lord Carlyon?"

"Yes. He is the master of the Manor now, and has ten thousand a year; but I don't think he will ever be happy again. I don't indeed, Dolores!"

"You said Mrs. Carlyon was a widow. If he chose, no doubt she would be willing to go back to their old relations."

May shook her head.

"You don't know Rex?"

"One doesn't need to know him to give an opinion. If he is wrapped up in the pretty widow he had much better let bygones be bygones, and marry her!"

May looked half vexed at the bare suggestion.

"You used to be romantic, Dolly, I thought you would have been full of pity for Lord Carlyon!"

"I never pity rich people," said Dolores, slowly. "It seems to me gold must lighten their sorrows wonderfully. Besides, I don't see what trouble Lord Carlyon has now!"

"Dolores!"

But the little *no-r-do-well* held her ground. "I don't," she said, stoutly. "If he's still in love with his cousin's widow he can marry

her. If he isn't, there's nothing for him to fret about!"

"Dolly, you are too exacting. Well, we won't talk about Rex. Let me tell you who is coming to-night. Do you know it is our first party here since my father's death?"

The list was rather lengthy. Ten or twelve people to stay in the house, and a dozen others from the neighbourhood to dine and spend the evening. Among others Dolores noticed the name of Lucy Leigh, who had been at school with her and May.

Sir Geoffrey and his mother went to the station to meet their guests. Mr. Pemberton was to drive with May to the town, shopping; and Dolores, who had set her heart on some hollyberries to wear with her plain black dress, declined May's entreaties to come in the brougham, and set out for a long ramble in the park.

"You are sure you are not frightened?" asked May. "Won't you take my maid with you?"

But Miss Fane laughed the idea to scorn. Did she not know the park as well as May herself, and what would the maid—a French damsel of much fashion—say to scrambling through a hedge?

"We will both have plenty of holly to wear to-night," said Dolores, decidedly. "And, May, it will be perfectly delightful to scamper through the old places again, and forget I am nineteen. I only wish you could come too."

"Don't tire yourself, dear," said May, kindly, "and don't be late. Mother and Geoff. will be home with the new arrivals soon after five, while Cousin John and I shall be in by four, and keep each other company till you come."

Dolores agreed at once. She put on a plain blue serge, the very oldest dress she had with her, a long cloth jacket, and the very same fur hat she had worn when Sir Geoffrey came to meet her in her father's church.

It was a lovely winter's day—the air crisp and frosty, just the ideal weather for Christmas Eve!

Dolores knew the holly bushes well. They grew at the further end of the park, just where it branched off into the wood.

There was a public footpath through the last, leading to Moresham, but it was seldom used; and Miss Fane had forgotten its existence till, as she finished filling her basket with the bright red berries, she saw a stranger watching her with rather marked attention.

Now, Dolores hated criticism; perhaps, poor child, because she had had so much of it all her life. She looked at the offender, and saw a dark man in a thick great-coat. Without waiting to inquire further she said, sharply,—

"You have made a mistake, I think. This part of the grounds is private!"

She was strictly in the right, for the gentleman had emerged from the wood, and instead of following the broad public path, had crossed to the holy hedge, which Miss Fane had been so busily robbing.

He bowed, and Dolores fancied there was a suspicion of sarcasm in his voice as he asked,—

"Are you a member of Sir Geoffrey's family?"

"I am his guest," said Dolores, valiantly.

"So am I!" retorted the stranger; "so if he allows you to trespass I fancy I may do so too. I made an awful mistake; got out at Little Moresham instead of going on to the junction, where I expect they sent to meet me. I have had to walk the whole five miles."

"Five miles is not far," said Dolly, who, finding herself in the wrong, felt, to use a nursery phrase, as though her temper had been thoroughly upset, and she must be spiteful.

"Our opinions differ, apparently; but if you are going back to the Court perhaps you will kindly be my guide, for I am quite a stranger in these parts."

Running through the list of guests rapidly in her mind, Dolores decided her new acquaintance must be a certain Mr. Goldsmith, a country squire, invited to the Court simply because his mother was cousin to Lady Dean.

As she said George Goldsmith cared for nothing but horses and dogs, his entertainment had been rather a difficulty.

"I am going back to the house now," admitted Miss Fane. "And I don't mind showing you the way, but there's no one indoors but May. Are you sure you wouldn't rather see the horses? Sir Geoffrey thinks he has a very fine stud."

"Thank you, I prefer to see Miss Dean. How is she?"

"May is better," she said simply; "at least people say so. How long is it since you have seen her?"

"I forget!" Then, as they drew near the house, "But pray don't let me deprive you of inspecting the horses, whose merits you described so well."

Dolores flushed. She had been called a coquette and a flirt times without number, but this was the first time any one had dared to accuse her of masculine tastes. She looked at her tormentor with visible anger.

"I am going to May," she said slowly. "My tastes are not those of a stable; you can please yourself."

"Are you staying at the Court?"

"I told you so before," said the girl defiantly. "You need not believe me unless you like."

He smiled, conduct which fairly exasperated Dolores. She said not another word until they reached the house, where the butler came forward to receive the guest, and Miss Fane ran helter-skelter into the drawing-room.

"May, I have met your cousin George, and he is odious."

To her intense surprise a fair, boyish-looking man, whom she had not noticed as sitting near her friend, said laughing,—

"Now, I call that a shame. I fancy, May, I am the only Cousin George you possess, and I'm sure I never dreamed of offending this young lady!"

May had a woman's tact, and introduced Dolores to Mr. Goldsmith at once, saying:

"Pray, what have you done with the individual you mistook for George?"

"Oh! he is in the hall."

Mr. Pemberton went out to meet him, and Dolores, sitting down on the sofa, received a cup of tea from the real Mr. Goldsmith with great relief.

"You mustn't think me rude," she said, in her pretty way. "But really he was odious!"

"Then I am glad I was not 'he'; but won't you tell me how my double offended you?"

"Oh! he wasn't like you in the least!" said Dolores, with a sincerity which flattered Mr. Goldsmith extremely. "He was horrible; he laughed at everything I said—sneered, I mean!"

"He must have been a cad!" said Goldsmith, promptly. "Have you been to gather dust?" touching her basket of holly. "What a lot you have got!"

"Haven't I?" Miss Fane's good temper had quite returned. "You see, May and I always used to go and gather holly when we were here as children."

"Then you and my cousin are old friends?"

"We were schoolfellows!"

They were sitting on a sofa by the fire. May Dean had left them and gone to greet her brother's guest.

Dolores could just see that there was nothing slighting in his treatment of her. He held the little hand in his, and smiled on the pretty child a smile which changed his whole face.

Perhaps it was as well Dolores could not catch his words.

"I am so sorry to have missed dear old Geoff. May—you'll let me say May still, won't you? I lost my way in the park, and fell in with the most disagreeable young woman I ever met. She wanted to take me round the stable! It's not like you to have such a very rapid young lady for a friend."

"She is the dearest girl I ever met!" replied May, loyally; "and I am sure you'll like her very much when you know her!"

"I beg leave to differ," said Lord Carlyon.

Dolores retired to her own room before Sir Geoffrey and his mother returned. She felt chagrined to think that she should have made such a stupid mistake, and mentally decided that, arrayed in her prettiest dress for dinner, Lord Carlyon would surely change his opinion of her. Then she recollected, with a crimson flush, his story. Rejected once for a richer man, would he not think all smiles given him now were owed solely to his title and fortune? Well, so be it, decided Dolores, almost viciously. At least he should confess there was one girl who never paid court to him. He should see there was one person proof even against his romantic history.

"I hate him!" decided the little ne'er-do-well, as she stirred the fire into a brighter blaze. "What business has he to make me think he was Mr. Goldsmith? I am sure 'Cousin George' is a great deal nicer than he is. Well, perhaps he won't stay long; it will be much nicer when he has gone!"

"Dolly!"

The voice was May's, and the exclamation was one of delighted admiration. She had come in to fetch her friend. It was their way always to go to the drawing-room together; but it seemed to May some fairy touch had been at work and changed Dolores from a pretty girl into a beauty.

May kissed her.

"I never saw you look so lovely!"

"Don't!" said Dolly, simply. "It's not me, May; it's your mamma's dress!"

"May I come in?"

It was Lady Dean. She had a small cardboard box in her hand, from which she took a necklace of delicate silver ivory.

"I wanted to give you this, dear!" she said, with a motherly smile to Dolores. "I thought it would be just the thing for you to wear to-night; but I see I was mistaken. Nothing would suit you so well as your holly berries!"

But Dolores exclaimed with delight at the silver necklace, and put it away carefully, while Lady Dean watched her with eyes of fond approval.

"Do you know, Dolly, I shall never quite forgive myself for that mistake of last spring! How could I have believed you would ever marry Mr. Banks?"

Dolly smiled half-mischievously.

"I am sure Miss Ketch is very glad I did not," she said, quietly. "She is quite delighted with her future prospects and brick house, a gig, and Mr. B., as she calls him. I don't know which of the three she esteems most. The wedding is to be in January. I am afraid mother will be intensely miserable till it is all over."

"Do you mean she really wished it, Dolly? She actually wanted you to marry that man?"

"So much so that she has never been quite the same to me since. There's something rather hard in one's own mother being so eager to be rid of one."

Then they went downstairs. Lady Dean presented Dolores to the stranger guests, among others to Lord Carlyon. Perhaps May had not had time to tell her of their unfortunate meeting in the wood. Then dinner was announced, and Dolly found herself going into it on the arm of George Goldsmith.

"I hope you don't mind!" he said simply, with quite a boyish blush. "May has been telling me, the last time she saw me, I could talk of nothing but dogs and horses, and so she had warned you against me, but I have grown out of that now."

"Don't talk as though you were Methusalem," admonished Dolly. "Dogs and horses are not bad things. I like them very much."

"I am glad of it. You see that girl over there? the one in pink. She's the niece of some neighbour of ours."

"She seems enjoying herself," said Dolores, carelessly.

"Yes, doesn't she? She's just the sort of

girl to appreciate a title. She's got hold of my double. Do you see, the man you met in the wood, and took for me?"

"What do you think of him?"

"Men are far more generous to their own sex than women."

"Oh, I daresay he's a good fellow enough. He's got a romantic history, hasn't he, and sets up for a misanthrope? I believe he fancies every woman who looks at him is after his money. Rather conceited, isn't it?"

"Very! Well, he can't think that of Lucy Leigh, for she must be nearly as rich as he is."

"I'm very glad you don't think so. They're going to dance after dinner, Miss Fane, May told me. Will you promise me the first waltz?"

"I shall be delighted!" said Dolores, quickly. "But do you know I have never danced at all since I left school. Perhaps I have forgotten how!"

"I don't believe you could. You look just made for dancing."

Lady Dean had made the signal to retire, and Dolores had to follow the train of ladies back to the drawing-room. She felt the least bit lonely and disconsolate.

She had sat down rather wearily on a sofa, and was both pleased and vexed when Miss Leigh joined her—pleased because Dolly liked to be alone; vexed, because she had never liked the heiress.

"I should have known you anywhere," said Miss Leigh, graciously. "You are not altered in the least!"

Kindly words to outward ears, but they hardly charmed Dolores. When she had last met Miss Leigh she was a schoolgirl of fourteen—an age when even the most favoured damsels look a trifle awkward and ungainly.

"You are very seldom in Mereham, I suppose?" said Dolores, nonchalantly. "I never recollect hearing of you being there since I left school!"

"I do not like Mereham," said Lucy. "The place never suits my health. Now, Dean Court, though so near, is quite a different atmosphere."

"It has been shut up a long time."

"Lady Dean is so anxious about May; I suppose she feared to risk the English climate for her, but it was absurd Sir Geoffrey's staying away so long. In his position he owes a certain duty to society. If his mother could not return to be his *châtelaine* he ought to have married."

"Perhaps he will some day," said Dolores, artlessly. "He is not too old yet."

Enter the gentlemen. Miss Leigh moved her silken draperies so as to disclose a vacant place beside her on the sofa. Dolores was leaning back, a large screen which she held in her hand completely hiding her face. Still, she was perfectly aware of Miss Leigh's manoeuvre, and also that Lord Carlyon took the seat intended for him.

From that moment Dolores had no share of the heiress's attention, and she was beginning to think of changing her seat when a speech of Reginald's fell on her ear, and chained her to her seat.

"I am pleased to have met you!" he was saying, his voice evidently in earnest. "All the Deans are my staunch friends, and I have heard so much of you from May I seem to know you well."

Miss Leigh smpered.

"Am I like May's description?"

"Hardly," he said, smiling; "but I fancy when you were parted and the Deans went abroad you and May were both children. I know her greatest desire in returning to England was to find out her 'Dolly.' I used to wonder a little whether she would find her friend as she left her, or be disappointed!"

"You are quite mistaken, Lord Carlyon. I was at school with May, but I am not the 'Dolly' she used to lament. They have met again, and I should fancy May sees the difference between now and five years ago."

"You mean she is disappointed?"

"I never asked her. I only arrived to-day; but anyone can see that Miss Fane is just a village coquette, full of second-rate airs and graces, who thinks it the greatest piece of good luck that ever befell her to visit here."

The screen came down from Dolores' face; her two cheeks were perfectly white, save for a vivid crimson spot in their centre. There was nothing angry or excited in her manner; she rose and turned to Lord Carlyon with the dignity of a princess.

"I have lived all my life in a country village, and I am so fond of Lady Dean and her daughter that I do think a visit to them the very greatest pleasure that could be offered to me. As you have received such a very minute account of me, Lord Carlyon, you may like this testimony to its truth!"

She walked slowly across the room to meet Lady Dean. The latter whispered some request, and before Lucy Leigh and Reginald had recovered from their surprise the little ne'er-do-well was seated at the piano.

Lord Carlyon groaned.

"She told me herself she cared for nothing but dogs and horses! Lady Dean might have spared us this exhibition!"

"She is perfectly infatuated with Dolores; the whole family are. Her voice is totally untrained and quite unsuited to such a display."

But Lucy forgot the five years which had passed since she knew Dolores at Mrs. Trafford's. In three of them the best master to be found in the old Cathedral city had trained Miss Fane's voice, and told her at his last lesson with her talents she would make a fortune on the stage. She shook her head; she knew she would not have dared repeat the compliment at home.

Conversation was at its height when Dolores sat down to the piano; but, somehow, when the first few chords of her accompaniment were heard the voices grew hushed, and when she began to sing a deep silence fell on the listeners.

She sang in English an air from *Sonnambula*, and every word echoed distinctly through the room. Her voice was rich and powerful, sweet and clear.

Old Mr. Pemberton was standing near her, and as she would have risen detained her.

"Will you sing once more to oblige an old man, my dear? Some old ballad I should like, and if possible, Scotch."

She smiled and agreed. She sang the saddest and sweetest of all Scotch love-songs, "Auld Robin Gray," and her listeners thought they had never pitied the ill-starred heroine of the old ballad half enough.

Lord Carlyon was impressed in spite of himself, but Lady Leigh was too conceited to change her opinion.

Later on he found himself near Dolores, and in his new-born pity he began to talk to her.

"I suppose you are very fond of music, Miss Fane?"

But Dolores had two things respecting him burnt in her brain. He fancied every woman wanted to marry him for his money, and he had let Lucy Leigh call her a village coquette. And so the little ne'er-do-well perversely decided she must defend herself by being as disagreeable as possible.

"Yes."

"I used to play myself once, but I gave it up. I have often regretted it since. Music is a great solace."

Dolores could have re-echoed his last sentiment. In all the crosses and petty vexations of her life music was her friend and consolation; but she would not seem to agree with Lord Carlyon.

"There is no chance of my giving it up."

"It would be a great pity if you did. Your friends would lose a treat!"

"I was thinking of the congregation," said Dolores wickedly. "They are too poor to afford an organist, so I always play for them. They like noisy music; it wakes them up, and ours is a very sleepy church."

"Most country churches are."

"I think," said Dolly, demurely, "it would

be much better if we had no sermons. They take father ages to write, and make him as cross as can be. Then no one ever listens to them."

"You can't be sure of that."

"I can. I sit in the organ-loft, and looking down I can see all the heads nodding except mother's, and she isn't listening."

"Why do you think that?"

"I know she is trying to calculate when it will be over. She gets more cheerful directly father arrives safely at 'Lastly.' You see, if it's too long dinner is such a scramble."

"And you are the eldest daughter. You must have a busy life, Miss Fane?"

"I! I am as idle as I can be; I hate work. To anyone who dotes on dogs and horses you know indoor life is trying."

"Dolly," said May, reproachfully, when her friend came into her room to discuss the evening, "how could you say that?"

"Well," said Dolly, defiantly, "if he chose to think it he could. I never said I doted on dogs and horses, but that to anyone who did indoor life must be trying."

"You know what you meant him to think; and, Dolly, I did so hope you would like Rex."

"I detest him!"

"But why?"

"I don't know," admitted Dolly, "unless it's that he seemed to dislike me. You see, May, I am used to women thinking me all that's bad; but as a rule men are more lenient."

"George is delighted with you. He is ever so much impressed, and he was always a good-hearted fellow."

"Why, May, you called him cruel!"

"He has a good, true heart," persisted May, who was full of schemes for Dolly's future, "and they have such a beautiful home in Yorkshire! His mother is the dearest old lady I ever saw."

But this speech was utterly thrown away upon Dolores.

"Well, I'm glad you liked him better than you expected, and I think he's much nicer than Lord Carlyon; but, May, how could you tell me Lucy Leigh had improved?"

"I thought so."

"She's as odious as ever!"

"Dolly!"

"I can't help it, May. I'm not good, like you, and when I think a thing I say it. I consider Lucy Leigh simply detestable!"

CHAPTER III.

CHRISTMAS passed, and we must confess Dolores enjoyed herself without a single anxious pang as to how her beloved organ was getting on without her.

She never cast a thought to the roast beef and rather sickly-looking plum-pudding which would be the Rectory festivities.

She simply enjoyed herself. Each day brought so much pleasure with it that she had no time to think of Mitford.

No one could have been kinder than Sir Geoffrey and Lady Dean—no sister could have been fonder than May; but yet, as the days wore on, in spite of the luxury and amusement, the kindness and friendship which surrounded her, there was just one drawback to her happiness.

Lord Carlyon and she were still sworn foes.

Our little ne'er-do-well, in her great desire that the poor should confess she, at least, had no designs on his hand, was often positively rude to him.

May tried her best to bring the two she loved to a better understanding of each other, but failed.

Sir Geoffrey grew positively angry with Rex when he spoke slightly of Miss Fane, and even Lady Dean told him she thought he judged Dolores harshly.

"I never see anything in Dolly's conduct I should blush for if I were her mother."

"Her own mother sees a good deal," said

Lord Carlyon, coldly; "at least Miss Leigh says so."

"Oh! if you are going to see with Lucy's eyes I give it up! She was never fair to Dolly as a child."

"I thought you liked her, Lady Dean?"

"I used to be very fond of her, Lord Carlyon; in fact, I invited her here in the hope she would make you happy; but I tell you frankly I am a little disappointed in her."

"Well, I don't want to marry her," said Rex, smiling; "so please, Lady Dean, don't reproach yourself with your efforts. But I don't see how she can have offended you."

Lady Dean did not enlighten him, and he went off to the smoking-room, for the conversation had taken place as he bade his hostess good-night. Sir Geoffrey welcomed him with a smile—very warm was their friendship.

"Well, when are we to congratulate you?"

Rex frowned.

"Lady Dean has just enlightened me as to her kind plans for my future!"

"I thought you had settled it by this time?"

"I would not marry Lucy Leigh if there was no other woman in the world! Go in and win the prize yourself, Geoff, if you like!"

Sir Geoffrey smiled.

"I thank you. I would rather not!"

"I am paying you quite a visitation," said Rex, suddenly. "Do you never wonder when I mean to take myself off?"

"I hoped you might stay till we went to London for Easter."

"I have some conscience. You shall get rid of me before that; but you see, Geoff, yours is a pleasant home to stay at, and I am homeless. Besides, it is ever so much nicer now all the crowd has departed."

For the visitors at the Court had dwindled down to five—the old clergyman, George Goldsmith, and Rex himself, while May's two schoolfellows supplied the feminine element.

"Yes; I wonder when Miss Leigh is going?"

"Most inhospitable of men! The fair guest seems in no hurry!"

"My mother is not so infatuated with her as she used to be, and May never cared much for her, so the duty of her entertainment falls on me, and I am by no means a lady's man."

"And Miss Fane," said Rex, quietly.

"When does her visit end?"

"There have been two or three attempts at a recall, but we have parried them successfully hitherto. Mother actually drove over to Mitford herself, which, as she simply detests the Rectory, was a great sacrifice. Then we have presented the parish with a deputy organist, so we hope to keep Dolly a little longer!"

"You all seem very fond of her?"

"We are. She always reminded me of a sunbeam—a sunbeam which no one at Mitford Rectory had the taste to appreciate!"

"It doesn't speak well of a girl not to get on with her own family?"

"Ah, you are always hard on Dolores. I wonder, Rex, why you dislike her?"

The question was parried then, but it returned again and again to haunt Lord Carlyon. Why did he dislike Dolores Fane?

"At least, she never tried to ensnare me," he confessed to himself one day. "Poor and with an uncongenial home, it would have been natural enough she should wish for a wealthy husband, but she never schemed for one."

He was interrupted by the sight of the subject of his thoughts. Dolores stood talking to the woman at the lodge, and petting her rosy baby, which seemed almost reluctant to leave her arms for his mother's. She made a very pretty picture as she stood there, and it dawned on Reginald slowly how very sweet her face was when she smiled.

"Are you going far, Miss Fane?"

"Only to the wood. I promised May some more holly."

"May I come with you?"

"If you like."

He had expected a refusal, but Dolores seemed unusually grave and thoughtful indeed. When they had been walking ten minutes, and she had not smiled once, he began to think

there must be something wrong.

"Is there anything the matter, Miss Fane?" "No," said Dolly resolutely; "at least, I ought not to think so; but—I am going home to-morrow!"

"That's rather sudden, isn't it?" "Mother says I have been here six weeks, and I shall be more spoilt than ever!"

"You will come again? May is too fond of you to be without you."

"May won't be pleased with me much longer!"

Rex was touched at the sad voice, the manner, so different from her usual arch ways. "I believe you have a great deal more heart than you admit, Miss Fane!" he said, suddenly. "Do you know, I have the strangest fancy about you. I think all these weeks you have been acting a part, and that you are not the girl of the period you have tried to appear, but a warm, generous-hearted child!"

"There was a strange mistiness about Dolly's blue eyes."

"I always wanted to explain it to you, only, somehow, I couldn't, and I was too proud to tell May. You see I took you for Mr. Goldsmith. I had heard he was fond of horses and dogs, and May is so delicate I wanted to take him off her hands and send him to the stables."

"And then—"

"Well, I had always made up my mind to hate you, just because May liked you so."

"You jealous child!"

"I'm not a child," said Dolly, gravely; "besides, I could not understand why May hated you, and called yours the saddest story ever heard."

"I suppose she told you?"

"Yes; and I thought you were rather cowardly to throw up everything!"

"Perhaps I was!"

"And now, as I told May, there was nothing to pity you for!"

"Because I am rich?"

"Oh, dear, no!" and Dolores shook her head. "Riches don't bring happiness. I'm sure the richest woman in Mitford is miserable. She's always grumbling at someone."

"Well, why am I not to be pitied?"

"Because your cousin is dead," said Dolores, quickly.

"And his widow is free?"

"But—"

"It's very strange," said Dolly. "If you don't care for her enough to marry her now you don't need pity for losing her. If you do care no doubt she will have you!"

Lord Carlyon smiled. He really could not help it.

"But I don't!"

"Then you have no right to go about the world posing as a broken-hearted individual."

"But do I?"

"Certainly. Lady Dean always calls you 'that poor Lord Carlyon!' You know she does!"

"Well, you see, I am a lonely, homeless man. I have three houses, but I can't go and live in them by myself."

"Invite Sir Geoffrey?"

"I am not sure that I want him. I would rather have someone else. Dolores, do you believe in second love?"

"Not for a woman!" returned the little ne'er-do-well, decidedly. "Men may be different; but I am sure a woman can only love once."

"Men are different!" said Rex, eagerly. "At least, I know I love you far better than I ever loved the false syren who wrecked my life! Dolores, could you forget our differences, and learn to love me?"

Dolores shook her head.

"You had much better think of someone else. I assure you I am always doing something that would have been far better left undone. Even father says I am a ne'er-do-well."

"But you see, Dolly, I love you! I want no one in the world but you. Put your hand in mine, little one, and promise to be my wife!"

So the pretty ne'er-do-well laid down her arms, and she and her sworn foe were plighted lovers. But, alas! for their new-found happiness. They had settled nothing, save that Lord Carlyon should drive over to see Mr. Fane that afternoon; and till his consent was obtained no one else was to hear of the engagement.

This was hardly decided when they met a telegraph boy bound for the house, who, recognising Reginald, put the ominous yellow envelope into his hands.

"Dr. Kennedy, Maiden Vale, to Lord Carlyon, Dean Court, Blankshire: Your aunt is dying. Come at once!"

"You must go," said Dolores firmly, when he had shown her the message. "You couldn't refuse such an appeal as that!"

"But surely, I can go over to Mitford first!"

"It would make a long delay, and I think I am rather glad that you should see Mrs. Carlyon before you speak to my father."

"Never."

Dolores smiled a little sadly.

"You have known me just six weeks, and I think you hated me pretty thoroughly the longest part of them."

"Promise to be true to me?"

"I shall love you while I live," answered Dolores, gravely. "I don't think I am given to change."

"And you will write to me?"

"I will answer your letters."

"Let me tell Lady Dean. Let me at least leave my darling to her care!"

But Dolores shook her head.

"I had rather that no one knew before papa. Surely we can trust each other? And, besides—"

Carlyon stroked her hand caressingly, and asked:

"And besides what, my dearest?"

"You know I laugh about the Rectory as though I did not care, but I am very fond of my father really. He is such a good man, and I am sure he has tried to love me. He can't help it that I am different to all his ideas of what his child should be."

"I don't see what fault he can find with you!" declared Lord Carlyon, "but you shall have your own way, Dolores. I will keep our secret until I can come myself and ask the Rector for his treasure."

"Did you know Lady Carlyon was ill?"

"She has been ailing for some months. I know that any sudden shock might increase her illness. Dolores, if she is as near death as I fear I shall not be able to leave her before the end. It may be a week or even a fortnight before I can come to Mitford."

Dolores smiled trustfully into his face.

"I am not afraid of waiting."

"This is our real good-bye," urged Rex, as they paused for a moment beside a rustic arbour, "not our chill, formal leave-taking before others. Dolly, look up at me and kiss me."

She hesitated, but Rex had a good deal of masterfulness in his nature, and Dolores loved to yield to those she cared for. She pressed her lips to his, looking at him the while with a world of love in her blue eyes.

"I always go in this way," she said, as they came in sight of the library, whose front windows stood open. "You had better go on to the hall and explain to Geoffrey."

It smote upon Lord Carlyon, even at that moment, he would rather she had not called his friend by his Christian name, but he was not going to chide his betrothed just yet. He watched Dolores lovingly till she was out of sight; then he walked up the terrace steps and met Sir Geoffrey, who stood there idly smoking a cigar.

The news was soon told, and the Baronet at once admitted the need for Reginald's departure. He rang and ordered the dog-cart to be prepared at once, then he turned to his friend.

"I wish this had not happened, Rex."

"So do I. I am really very much attached to my aunt, although we have been very little together of late years. I can't refuse to go to her, and yet I would give a great deal to stay here."

"You must go! But, Reginald, forgive me for just one word of warning. Be careful."

Very pale and haughty had grown Lord Carlyon's face. In his sensitive reserve he resented the implied caution before it was spoken.

"I fail to understand what danger can lurk in my aunt's house. Explain yourself, Dean!"

"I mean to," said Geoff, simply. "Three years ago your life was blighted by as false a woman as ever breathed, but though false she was dazzlingly beautiful, and had rare fascinations. I do not suppose three years have deprived her of her charms. I know you loved her well. She will appear to you poor, sorrowful, lonely and friendless. It seems to me very possible you may mistake compassion for a warmer feeling, and place your happiness in her hands a second time."

There was something so earnest in Geoff's manner, the warning was so thoroughly disinterested, that Lord Carlyon was touched by it in spite of himself.

"Believe me, Geoff, that is impossible. I go to my aunt's house with a charm which will protect me efficiently against any syren. I grant the danger had I met Gertrude Carlyon before I came here; but I found a cure for the old wound at the Court—more steadfast, if less passionately, than I loved Gertrude in the old days. I love another."

"And she is here?" and Geoff's eyes opened wider in their bewilderment.

"She is beneath your roof. If only she had allowed me I should have spoken to your mother before leaving. As it is, I must wait till my return. It will be another bond between us, Geoff, that I found my happiness in your beautiful old home!"

He was gone. He said not another word. Perhaps he felt he had already said more than his promise to Dolores of secrecy warranted.

Sir Geoffrey Dean, the simplest and most straightforward of men, fell into a blunder as natural as it was mistaken. He thought his friend was in love with his own sister, pretty gentle May.

Lady Dean had planned more than one match for Lord Carlyon without ever thinking of her own child; but Geoff, who in many things was clearer-sighted than his mother, guessed that Rex had always been May's hero.

"And she won't let him speak to the matter before he has seen that false syren who wrecked his life before. Well, I don't think the brilliant Gertrude stands much chance against our Mayflower!"

From his sister's love affairs his mind wandered not unnaturally to his own. He had known now for many a year the face he wanted for the sunshine of his home. He had loved Dolores ever since the old childish days when she came to the Court as May's play-fellow; but Geoffrey Dean was romantic.

He would never speak a word of love to her until he felt she was prepared to listen to him; and if she said "no," none of her own family should learn what she had refused. He would keep the secret even from his mother and May.

Sir Geoffrey had but one difficulty to face, Dolores herself; and as she never shrank from his society, and gave him her friendship and confidence as frankly as when she was ten years old, it did not seem to him she would condemn him to despair.

Dolores went straight to her own room after parting from her lover. She flung herself on the sofa, and tried to think; but everything seemed in a maze.

Rex loved her! That was enough for happiness! She felt quite a different creature from the little, lonely ne'er-do-well who had come to the Court.

"I am almost too happy," thought poor little Dolores. "I have just nothing left to wish for! I can even forgive that cruel Gertrude,

for, if she had not forsaken him, he would never have come here!"

"Rex," she continued to muse, "means king. He was made to be a king! My king!"

She dwelt a little fondly on the last pronoun. Then she got up and began to arrange her hair, for it was nearly lunch-time. As she took her away to May's room she felt just a little regret she had not made one exception to her rule of secrecy.

She tapped lightly at the door. No answer, and she went in. She and May were too much like sisters to stand on ceremony with each other; but the sight which met her gave her a shock which drove away for a moment all thought of her own happiness!

On a little red velvet chair at the far end of the room sat, or rather crouched, poor May. She was crying so bitterly that she had never heard Dolores' tap, and even now seemed unconscious of her presence.

Dolores walked back to the door, and bolted it; then she put her arms round her friend, and begged her to tell her what was the matter.

But May cried on—heavy sobs, which shook the slender frame. Dolores grew frightened.

"May!" implored the elder girl. "Dear May, only speak to me, and tell me what it is!"

But May sobbed on, as though she did not hear.

"You will make yourself really ill, dear! Shall I fetch your mother. Indeed, you must not cry like this!"

But that roused the poor child. She clung to Dolores' hand, and whispered—

"No, no; don't tell mamma! Dolly, you will keep my secret, won't you? I know it is weak and foolish; but you won't despise me!"

Dolores sat down on the floor and took May's two little hot fevered hands in her cool ones. She kissed the girl's troubled brow, and said, tenderly—

"I could never despise you, my darling, just as I could never leave off loving you; and I will keep your secret as though it was my own from all the world. Only trust me!"

"He has gone away!"

Only those four words, which seemed wrong from her, almost against her will. Only just those four words, yet they told Dolores May's secret, and stuck a sword through her own heart.

There was but one person who had left the Court that day—Rex Carlyon.

"He will come back!" said Dolores, faintly, feeling as if she would give the world to scream, yet keeping calm by a wonderful effort.

"You see," said May, simply, "Geoff told us his history when it happened, and I pitied him so. I used to think in those days, child as I was, I would give my own life—oh, so gladly! just to put things right for him!"

"I understand," said Dolores, with a bitter certainty things could never be put right for her in this life—never, never more!

"And then, when he was Lord Carlyon, he came abroad to us, and he seemed to care to talk to no one but me. He called me his little friend, and comforted me. I was not quite sixteen; perhaps he thought me a child. He left us, promising we should meet in England. Dolly, don't despise me; but I have just lived on that promise ever since!"

Dolores only kissed her. The poor little ne'er-do-well was quick to read between the lines of the and love-story, and knew that her hero was blameless.

"He will come back," repeated Dolores, faintly. She could think of nothing but this parrot-like phrase, which failed to bring any comfort to herself.

"I lived for this meeting," went on May, feebly. "Mother used to plan for Rex to marry Lucy Leigh, but I felt she was not true enough for him, and I loved him. No one can love him as I do. I have just lived on his memory all these months. If he was a beggar in the street I should feel just the same."

So would Dolores. She just stroked May's hair, for words would not come to her.

"You see," said May, quietly, "he may have thought me a child abroad, but I am grown up now. I was presented last spring, and I am seventeen."

"Seventeen is young to be married."

"But, Dolly, don't you see, if he cared like that he would have spoken before he left me. And he has gone to his aunt's house, where Gertrude Carlyon lives. She will win him from me, and I shall see his great, true heart broken a second time. He loves me—I am sure of it—but Gertrude will be his wife."

Dolores soothed her tenderly, declared her own conviction that Mrs. Carlyon would never regain the heart she had once spurned; and by degrees May grew calmer, and even smiled wistfully, as she looked up into Dolly's face and asked,

"Do you really think he will come back to me?"

"I am sure he will come back," said Dolores, stolidly. "Now, May, I am going to send your maid up with some lunch, and if you don't eat every bit I shall scold you till you're frightened to death!"

May pulled her friend's face close to hers, and whispered something in her ear.

Dolly shook her head reprovingly, and left the room, but those words haunted her strangely.

"You mustn't despise me, Dolly," the poor child had begged; "but you see I never was like other girls. I just lived for him all these weary months, and I shall die the day I hear his wedding bells."

Dolores Fane, the "village coquette," the little ne'er-do-well, crept back to her own room and locked the door upon herself and her trouble. She shed no passionate tears as May had done. She sat in dumb despair, and looked her sorrow in the face. They both loved him, and one of them must be sacrificed.

CHAPTER IV.

Dolores put one hand to her aching head, and tried to think. Of one thing she was resolved. Come what might, she would never found her happiness on May's broken heart. After that piteous confidence, May should never see her at Reginald Carlyon's side his happy wife. Of the main fact, that she must be the one sacrificed, Dolores was quite resolved.

She was wondering dimly how early she could go home on the morrow without annoying her hostess, when there came a tap at the door.

Dolores opened it hastily, trusting to the excuse of a headache to excuse her heavy eyes if the maid were anxious about her looks. But it was no servant who stood there, but Lady Dean, looking wonderfully tender and compassionate.

"My dear child," and she put one arm round her with motherly warmth, "I have some bad news for you!"

That seemed to Dolores simply impossible. She could not think of any grief that would add to her troubles; so she looked up bravely, and asked, "What is it?"

"Your father is ill."

Dolores started. Never within her memory had the Rector suffered anything. A stern, hard man he seemed, exempt from all human frailties, including weak health. Dolores never loved him as most girls loved their fathers, but he was dearer to her than all the other Rectory folk put together.

"Don't you think I had better go home to-day?" she asked Lady Dean. "You know there will be a great deal to do! My mother may want help!"

"Yes, dear, I think you ought to go; indeed, Mrs. Fane has sent for you. A boy just rode over with a note from her, begging me to send you home at once. The carriage is getting ready. My dear child, we shall miss you terribly!"

Dolores clung to her with an agony of grief which surprised the gentle matron. She had never thought the girl so passionately attached to Mr. Fane as this.

"You have been so kind to me!" sobbed Dolores; "and I have been so happy here! I shall never forget these six weeks, never while I live!"

"You must come back to us," said Lady Dean, kindly, "as soon as you can be spared from home. Geoffrey seems to think May will be giving herself away before so very long, and I shall want a daughter!"

"I cannot understand it," said Dolores, slowly, as though it had only just dawned on her to be surprised. "I had a letter from Janey only yesterday, and papa was quite well then!"

"It is an accident," said Lady Dean, gravely. "The Rector was thrown from his horse early this morning." She did not like to add, in Mrs. Fane's very outspoken words, "the doctor gives no hope of his recovery," but she felt surprised that the idea of danger never presented itself to Dolores.

"That horrid horse!" said the girl, regretfully. "Father always borrowed it when he was very busy, and, somehow, I was always afraid of it."

"I hope you will find Mr. Fane better!" said her friend, kindly; "and, Dolores, remember, if any trouble comes to you, I have always a home for you here. After my own children, I know no one dearer to me than my little friend."

Dolores kissed her, and tried to speak gratefully; but how could she tell Lady Dean that trouble had come to her already, one which made Dean Court, of all places in the world, the most impossible home for her!

Sir Geoffrey put her into the brougham, and took his place beside her.

"Are you coming, too?"

"I could not let you go alone!"

"Sir Geoffrey, do you think my father is very ill?"

"I fear so!"

The very tone of his voice told her what Lady Dean had shrunk from hinting at.

"Not dying!" said Dolores, simply. "Oh, Sir Geoffrey, you can't mean that. He never loved me as he did Janey and the others; but he was kinder to me than anyone else at home. And what will my life be like without him?"

Geoffrey took her hand.

"He may not be so bad. Your mother may have written too dependently, but her note made us fear the worst."

She did not speak, but he could feel the trembling of the hand he held.

"Dolores, do you trust me?"

"Yes," said the girl, simply, "better than my own parents. You were always good to me, Sir Geoffrey!"

"You did not call me 'Sir Geoffrey' on our last drive alone together. I was Geoff then!"

"I feel so much older now!"

"I did not mean to speak to you yet, Dolores. I feared to startle you; but this sudden trouble has changed my mind. I cannot let you go into, perhaps, bitter sorrow without telling you you have one friend who will never fail you!"

Dolores smiled wistfully.

"I know it! You have always been just like a brother to me. I believe you would be as ready to help me in any trouble or difficulty as May herself."

Just like a brother! That was not how Sir Geoffrey wished to be regarded.

"Dolores," he said, gravely, "you don't understand me. I am trying to tell you that you are first with me in all the world. That I love you better than my mother and May, and seek no better happiness than to marry you. Oh, my little love, whom I have waited for all these years, don't tell me it is all in vain!"

It was an escape she had never dreamed of. She had but to put her hand into Sir Geoffrey's and promise to be his wife, and her sacrifices were brought about.

"Geoff," she said, simply, "I think you are the noblest man I ever met, and it is just like you to want to marry a girl whom every one calls a failure. But it can't be. I am very fond

of you, but I don't love you 'like that,' and I never shall!"

"You can't be sure, Dolly!"

"I am quite sure!" There was a kind of choked sob in the girl's voice. "You see, Geoff, I know what love is. Just as you care for me I care for someone else!"

"Who is it, Dolly?"

Dolores turned to him with a strangely calm face.

"You must not ask me," she said, gently.

"We are as much separated as though one of us were dead. Nothing in the whole world would ever make me marry him, only I can never marry anyone else."

And Sir Geoffrey, noble open-hearted fellow as he was, took her meaning literally.

"My poor little Dolly!"

Dolly let her head rest against his shoulder as though she needed the support.

"I can trust you!" she whispered. "I know you will never tell anyone!"

"Never; but I never suspected you had such a secret. Poor child, you seemed so bright and gay!"

Dolores smiled half wistfully.

"Isn't it a pity, Geoff, we don't all love the right person? There would be no heartaches and disappointments then!"

"You are so young, Dolly!" he whispered, sadly. "Why, ten years hence you will be younger than many who think themselves girls. Don't you think in time—"

Dolores shook her head.

"I don't think I am good at forgetting, Geoff," she said, simply. "We are nearly at the Rectory now, and before I say good-bye I want you to do me a favour."

"You know I will do it, Dolores! What is it?"

It was so long in coming he marvelled.

"I think," began Dolly, slowly, "there is a great change coming over my life! Don't you notice, Geoff, how one may go on in the same groove year after year for ages, and then suddenly everything alters? Well, I think it will be so with me! You know I am a 'failure,' and most people think me a ne'er-do-well. I want you to promise me that, whatever happens, you will think kindly of me, and get May to do the same?"

"My dear child!" said Geoffrey, much surprised, "we could not do otherwise. We love you too well! Even if we never saw you again, May and I should cherish your memory tenderly."

"That is all I want."

Not another word passed between them till the carriage stopped at the Rectory gates. Geoffrey waited till Dolores was out of sight, then drove home with his aching heart.

Janey opened the door to her sister. Quite calm and dry-eyed, this young person gave no signs of grief. Indeed, she seemed rather to enjoy the bustle and excitement caused by her father's sudden illness.

"How is he?" asked Dolores.

"As bad as bad can be," returned Janey, in a tone of great importance. "You'd better take off your hat and jacket and go up to him at once, ma says. Dear me, Dolores, where did you get that dress?"

Dolly had almost forgotten she was wearing her pretty black velvet. She said, simply it was a present from Lady Dean. Then she went gently upstairs, and met the doctor on the landing.

He led her quietly into a little dressing-room, nearly opposite her father's chamber. She looked into his face, and understood its sorrowful expression aright—"no hope."

"Is he really so very ill?"

"My dear young lady, he is dying. Of that there is no doubt. He seems only anxious to speak to you. Can you command yourself sufficiently to go to him at once?"

"I think so." Her lip quivered. "Poor father. I know he thinks me very wicked."

"It is not that," said Dr. Gray, quickly; "but I fear the communication may give you pain. Can you bear it?"

"I must! Does my mother know?"

"Mrs. Fane and I discovered it through his delirium, my dear!" and the old man patted her kindly on the shoulder. "I am very sorry for you."

Half-wondering why, Dolores followed him into the sick-room. She had to pass Mrs. Fane, and would have kissed her; but the lady pushed aside the proffered caress, and addressed herself to her husband.

"As soon as you have spoken to the girl I will come back to you, Laurence."

The door was shut. Dr. Gray had followed Mrs. Fane; the Rector and Dolores were alone.

"My dear," said the dying man, gently, "I am afraid I have wronged you, but I did it for the best, Dolores—I did it for the best."

It was a sad story, told in that faltering breath, and with those pitiful pauses for strength; but I think myself the recording angel would not enter that secret as a very grievous sin against the Rev. Laurence Fane. To my mind, what he confessed to Dolores concerned one of the kindest actions of his life.

He told her how, before he became a clergyman, he led a wild, godless life, and sought the society of idle worldlings. Then he met a beautiful girl, with whom he fell desperately in love. His suit was refused. He took a "serious" turn, went to a theological training college, and was just ordained when his father died. He married a girl in his native place, and accepted a London curacy, which brought in only just enough to keep them. His wife was expecting her first child, when he was called to see a stranger who was very ill. In the poverty-stricken creature who lay literally dying of starvation, with a new-born child beside her, he recognised his lost love, now a widow.

He went home to find his wife unconscious, and a little dead baby arrived. The woman who officiated as nurse and doctor was no common hireling, but one of those good creatures who, without wearing any distinctive garb, have yet given their lives to Heaven and the poor. Mrs. Bond was a Methodist, and fond of quoting texts. It seemed to her a special providence that Mr. Fane's little daughter had breathed and died, since it left a home for the helpless stranger. She saw no wrong in it, only a work of charity in the exchange.

An hour decided it. Dolores Linley lay in Mrs. Fane's carefully-prepared bassinette; the dead, nameless babe was buried with Laurence Fane's first love!

There was no crime against the law, for, knowing he was moving to a distant parish as soon as his wife's health permitted, the clergyman had the birth and death of his own child registered.

The only person wronged was Mrs. Fane, and as she was fond of children and would have been bitterly disappointed at having none, perhaps her husband thought he was acting for her interests.

But the deception pressed on him. From the day he had to struggle for the child's name to be Dolores she was a source of contention in his home.

Mrs. Fane never loved her, and the Rector, (as he had then become), finding his own affection for the little girl only exasperated his wife, was forced to hide the warmth of his feelings, and by the time he came to Mitford anyone would have supposed him as indifferent as Mrs. Fane towards their eldest child.

He was brought home unconscious from his fall. His first wandering words told Mrs. Fane Dolores was not his child; and, like an obstinate woman, the moment he had recovered his senses he insisted on his telling her all.

Narrow-minded and unlogical she actually cast the whole blame of the transaction on Dolores and her dead mother. She acquitted her husband of all blame (though the deception was his), but she traduced Mrs. Linley's memory, and demanded that the stranger's child should at once be expelled from her brood.

Dolores understood as she listened. Cold and passionless as she had thought the Rector, his heart had held one deep love. For her dead mother's sake he had fought her battles with Mrs. Fane, even though he had had to take her part by stealth.

"You forgive me," said the dying man, sadly; "for, child, I did it for the best!"

Dolores stooped over him and kissed him.

"There is nothing for me to forgive. What do I not owe you? But for you I might have grown up a workhouse foundling."

"I meant to make you happy," said the Rector, gravely, "but things were against it."

"I have been very happy," said Dolores, warmly, thinking how gladly she would have rolled time back to the day she left Mitford Rectory for the Court; "and you have been kinder far to me than I deserve."

"Heaven bless you, child!" he said gently; and then, before his wife had returned or his own children been summoned to his death-bed, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER V.

The moment Mrs. Fane heard of her husband's death she declared that Dolores Linley should leave her house. Not another night should she sleep beneath the roof which sheltered her own dear, defrauded children.

Dr. Gray tried in vain to argue with her, then he said gravely to Dolores,—

"My dear child, will you come to us? Mrs. Gray will make you welcome, I know; or, if you prefer it, I will drive you myself to Dean Court."

But Dolores said she would rather stay with Mrs. Gray if he was sure she should be welcome.

The old gentleman smiled.

"My wife knows the story, Dolores. I knew it would be half over the village by to-morrow, so I went home and told her. Her last words to me were to bring you back to her. She said Mrs. Fane would make the Rectory a kind of purgatory to you. I did not guess how right she was."

Mrs. Gray welcomed Dolores warmly. The Doctor and his wife lived on the outskirts of Meresham, too far for a walk from Mitford Rectory, and so Dolores had very seldom been to see them; but she knew the dear old couple had never joined in the criticisms of "that Miss Fane!" and that their welcome was honestly sincere.

Long into the night she was awake and thinking. There was little fear of Rex hearing of her father's death, and the story of her parentage. The Deans were his only correspondents in that part of the world; and Sir Geoffrey, after his own disappointment, was not likely to mention the cause of it in his letters, but none the less she must make haste and decide what to write to Lord Carlyon. Marry him she could not, but she fancied her sacrifices must go even further to be accepted. To make Rex forsake her she must let him believe her worthless.

It was long past midnight when Dolores lighted a candle, jumped out of bed, and began to write with feverish eagerness:—

"DEAR LORD CARLYON,—

"Please forget all you said to me to-day. I ought not to have carried my little comedy so far, but I made up my mind you deserved to be punished for your low opinion of me. I resolved you should find that the 'unwomanly, fast conboy' could yet bring you to her feet, and I have succeeded. I would not marry you if you were a duke, and twice as rich as you are; but if you are in despair for a baroness, I wonder you never thought of Sir Geoffrey's sister. She is meek enough not to mind being tyrannised over, and as she regards you almost as a saint, would doubtless be happy to obey you. For me, I like my liberty; it is the best thing worth having."

"Hoping you will soon forget our little quarrel, and think seriously of my excellent advice," I am,

"Yours truly,
"DOLORES FANE."

This was her fourth attempt, and at last she decided it would do. She fastened the envelope and directed it. Then the poor, little ne'er-do-well went back to bed, and sobbed herself to sleep.

Breakfast was at nine. Dolores remembered, as in a dream, a pillar-box stood opposite the house, and contrived to run out and post the letter before the gong sounded its cheerful summons. Both the Doctor and his wife exclaimed at the sight of her white cheeks and heavy eyes, but they said nothing until the repeat was over, and then Mrs. Gray led the way to her own sitting-room, and told Dolores she wanted to talk to her.

"You see, dear," said the kind old lady, "apart from Mrs. Fane's harsh conduct, this discovery places you in no worse position than must have been yours whenever the Rector died. The Linleys were gentlefolks, and their daughter is at least the equal of Mrs. Fane's own children. You must never let yourself think anyone can blame or look down on you for not being the Rector's daughter."

"Do you know I think I'm glad!" said Dolores, slowly. "Father was good to me, though he seemed harsh; but the others never loved me. I don't think I could have borne life with them after he was gone. Now, at least, I am free!"

"And how will you use your freedom?" asked Mrs. Gray. "I need not tell you, dear, you are welcome to a place in our home for months or years, but I want to know your own wishes!"

"I don't think I have any."

"The most natural thing would be for you to go to the Court. Lady Dean and her daughter are your oldest friends, and in their position they could do so much for you, while in our quiet home I am afraid you would have rather a sad-coloured life."

A few weeks ago Dolores would not have understood this speech, now she knew Mrs. Gray meant that at the Court she would probably soon find a rich husband, while few young men visited at the old red-brick house.

A desperate resolve came to the girl. She could not carry out her sacrifice alone. She must trust someone, if not entirely, at least in part. Where should she find a better confidante than kind Mrs. Gray?

"I cannot go to the Court!" she said simply. "Mrs. Gray, if I tell you why, will you promise me never to let anyone even guess the reason?"

"I will keep your secret surely, Dolores; but, my dear, I can't believe that anything would make you unwelcome at the Court! I saw Lady Dean only last week, and she told me she looked on you almost as her own child!"

"That is just it!" and poor Dolores' cheeks grew crimson. "Yesterday, Sir Geoffrey asked me to be his wife. Now, don't you see why, of all places in the world, his house is the last home for me?"

"But, my dear Dolores, his mother is there to chaperone you. Besides, Mr. Fane not being your own father, the marriage might be hastened without any allusion to his memory. Child, you can't think how glad your news has made me. Sir Geoffrey is a man in a thousand!"

"He is indeed!" echoed Dolores; "but, Mrs. Gray, you don't understand. I am not going to marry him!"

"You refused him! Then, my dear, there must be someone else. I don't believe there is a girl in the world who, if fancy free, would say nay to Geoffrey Dean."

"He is all that is true and noble; but I do not love him. Mrs. Gray, while every throb of my heart is for another, how could I deceive Sir Geoffrey by marrying him?"

"I see it all, my dear," said the kind old

lady, "and you have acted bravely. Better give your hand where your heart is than become Lady Dean of Dean Court; but I'm sorry, very sorry. My lady is a proud woman, Dolores. If she ever suspected you had refused her son, warmly as she has loved you, I fancy she would cease to be your friend!"

"I don't think she will ever suspect it; that is why I have told you. I want you to help me. Mrs. Gray, I cannot stay in Blankshire. I never made friends here. Mrs. Fane will be certain to prejudice people against me, and don't you think the sudden break in my intimacy at the Court will be a terrible weapon in her hands?"

"Yes; you could not go there as things are," admitted Mrs. Gray. "It would be impossible that you and Sir Geoffrey should meet continually; and if you stayed with me Lady Dean would think herself aggrieved at your preferring our home to hers. My dear child, I don't like the idea of your going out into the world, but I see no help for it."

Mrs. Gray was one of those large-hearted women who do not withdraw their help because they differ from their *protégés*, and she set to work to think of some sphere suited for Dolores' industry.

A very tender letter came from May.

"Mother says," wrote the gentle girl, "that she can be quite as fond of Miss Linley as of Dolores Fane, and you are to come to us as soon as Mrs. Gray will spare you, and be my sister. We are all very sad just now, for Geoff has rushed off to London, and declares he is going for a long tour in Italy. We can't imagine why, and it troubles us a great deal. Mother will call herself in the morning, and make Mrs. Gray consent to our plans."

Dolores read the letter as a creature in a dream, but her decision was taken. Both Dr. Gray and his wife thought her "good-night," to them strangely earnest in its affectionate gratitude. But they were quite taken by surprise the next morning to find their little guest flown, and the following note the only explanation:—

"My dear Mrs. Gray,—I can never thank you and the doctor enough for all your kindness, but I have thought it over, and I fear I am not suited for a governess, I cannot live on stranger's charity, however kind; and so I am going to the only person I know of in the world on whom I have a claim. Do not try to find me. Indeed, it is best not. Tell the Deans to think as kindly of me as they can, and tell May I never loved her better than I do now, when I am leaving her without even a goodbye. None of my Blankshire friends will ever see me again, but I shall never forget their kindness to the girl who for so many years believed herself to be "DOLORES FANE."

That was all! The doctor and his wife read the letter together, and saw that it was blattered with tears.

"Heaven help the poor child," said the doctor solemnly. "A sweeter girl never lived."

"It seems a cruel thing for me to say, but I really think we had better do as she herself entreats, and not try to find her," said Mrs. Gray, after discussing Dolores for half an hour or so.

And May! The friend of Dolly's childhood for whom her sacrifice had been made, how did she bear the news her mother carried her of her playmate's sins? May positively refused to believe in it.

"I shall trust her always, mother," she said, firmly. "I don't believe Dolores could deceive us. I believe if only she were here she would explain all that puzzles us!"

"She never will be here again," said the irate Dowager. "At least, not while I am mistress of the Court. Geoff's wife can please herself!"

"I don't think, mother, Geoff will ever have a wife now. Did it ever strike you he cared for Dolores? When she refused George, he looked so thankful that I guessed his secret."

"She angled well enough for him."

"Mother, it is not like you to be so harsh." Lady Dean was almost in tears.

"I loved her so, May. All these years I pitied her for having such an uncongenial home, and these last six weeks she crept into my heart, so that I could quite have forgiven her for being the child of a nameless actress, and would have adopted her as my own daughter, and then she goes off like this!"

"She did not go willingly," repeated May. "I am quite sure of that. And, mother, if we who have loved her are so ready to blame her, what will strangers say? I wish Geoffrey was here."

"And I am thankful he is not. May, I solemnly forbid you to write to your brother on the subject. Now remember!"

"But, mother, I must tell him!"

"It is not a fit story for you. Leave the telling of it to me."

And Lady Dean, in spite of her anger, softened a little before she wrote to Sir Geoffrey, so that the version he received was that Dolores Linley (he had been told of the new name in a previous letter), had preferred to leave Blankshire, and that Mrs. Gray (this was rather exaggeration) thought she had acted for the best. Mrs. Trafford found her an excellent situation, and the Grays were willing to give her a home for life, so that she was by no means friendless or ill-used.

The impression made on Sir Geoffrey was that Dolly had accepted the "excellent situation," and, hard though it was to fancy her working for her bread, he could understand to her it might be preferable to charity, however friendly.

This was precisely what Lady Dean intended. She knew her son too well not to guess that, had he only heard the true version of Dolores' departure, he would have been back in England as soon as steam could bring him, and never rest until he had found her, and assured himself with his own eyes of her well-being.

CHAPTER VI.

For once suspicion had been wrong. Geoffrey Dean, the kindest of men, had yet deemed it needful to warn Lord Carlyon against his former *fiancée*, but the warning had been needless.

Gertrude Carlyon had injured Reginald once, cruelly and terribly. Coquettes are said to be incurable, but in this case the cure had been wrought. Gertrude had suffered terribly during her few months of wifehood.

When Reginald Carlyon came into the title Gertrude had been a widow just a year, and perhaps she was the only woman of her acquaintance who did not cogitate upon the chances of his proposing to her again.

She knew his love of truth and innate sense of honour, and felt he would never stoop to trust her a second time. Besides, the young widow was aware what as yet no one, not even her mother-in-law, suspected, that she was the victim of a fell disease.

The first doctor in London, whom she consulted privately, told her she might live only a few months. It was possible, with care, she would last three years longer, but he did not think so.

Dr. Kennedy, when he sent that summons to Lord Carlyon, marvelled just a little whether he ought not to prepare him for the change in Mrs. Carlyon.

Beautiful she was still, and must ever be, but it needed no medical experience to tell a keen observer that she was dying. Before the June roses bloomed she would be with her husband.

The chance was not given him, after all. Lord Carlyon arrived sooner than he was expected; and the footman, a new-comer, who was not up in the family history, ushered him straight into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Carlyon was reclining on the sofa.

"Gertrude!"

She was calmer far than he. Is it because women are more used to suffer that they hide

their feelings better? Perhaps, though, in this case the near approach of death explained Gertrude's composure. It is wonderful how faint and small earthly things seem to us when we are in sight of the eternal shore!

"Gertrude!" She shook hands with him and sank back on the sofa, looking more fragile than ever as she said:

"We thought you would come. The doctors think mamma much weaker to-day."

"And you!" exclaimed Rex, passionately. "Has no doctor seen you? Did people actually let you fade away under their eyes without bestirring themselves?"

"Indeed, no. I have had the best advice in London; Lady Carlyon was kindness itself."

"And the doctor said?"

Gertrude smiled at his old, eager way. "He said that the end was not far off. Nay, Rex—if I may call you so—it is not worth grieving for. You, of all people in the world, have no cause to pity me."

"You were the picture of health and strength!"

"I seemed so! But you know my mother died of decline; and they tell me that, however easy and bright my life had been, I should never have seen thirty."

"You are not near thirty!"

"I am twenty-five, and I have made a great mistake of my life. I don't think, Rex, anyone who cared for me would regret my going. I have nothing left to live for, and I am so tired!"

Twenty-five and dying! Dr. Kennedy, appealed to by Lord Carlyon, told him frankly nothing could be done; his aunt and her daughter-in-law were alike beyond his skill. Their days were surely numbered, and very soon he would be left the last of his name.

And it was with this ringing in his ears that he read Dolores' letter—the letter which it had cost her so much to write.

Lord Carlyon flung it into the fire and watched till it was reduced to ashes. It seemed to him his second love had treated him more shamefully than his first.

He stayed a month in London, and when he left it he was the last of his name. Of the two women who had borne it, Gertrude died first, her last words a prayer for his forgiveness. Lady Carlyon survived a week. Then, after the stately funeral, Reginald was free.

It puzzled him that he had heard nothing from the Deans—that the only letter from Blankshire was Dolores' cruel note. But he knew he was welcome at any time, and so he went down uninvited, and one beautiful March day presented himself at the Court. The butler declared her ladyship would be delighted to welcome Lord Carlyon. She was out driving, but expected in soon; Miss Dean was in the library.

"And Sir Geoffrey?"

"The man staid."

"My master is in Italy, my lord. I thought you knew it! The ladies are to join him soon if Miss Dean does not get stronger."

Lord Carlyon entered the library unannounced.

May started up, a crimson flush dyeing neck and brow. In a moment she had recovered her composure; but the blush had told Reginald, however much she had deceived him in other things, Dolores Fane had been true in telling him that here was one who would not scorn his love.

"All alone, May?"

"Mother will be in soon. She will be so glad to see you! Have you come to stay?"

"That depends upon you, May!" said Lord Carlyon, without the slightest agitation in his voice. "My dear little girl, we have been friends for a long time. Do you think you could be happy as my wife?"

"Rex!"

"I will make you happy, May, if will can do it. Child, will you really trust your fresh, girlish heart to the keeping of such a weary, world-tossed man as I am?"

"I have loved you always," whispered May.

"Do you know, I think I loved you long ago in Italy?"

"And yet you helped Lady Dean to bring Miss Leigh here to captivate me?"

"You would never have cared for her. You couldn't!"

"Is she here now?" asked Lord Carlyon, with a pretended alarm.

"Oh, dear, no! Mother and I are quite alone," returned May. Even Cousin John has left us; and Geoff is roaming about Italy."

"And"—it must be done, there was no use in putting it off, since the question must be asked and answered as well now as a week hence—"and Miss Fane?"

May's blue eyes filled with tears.

"Rex," she said, gently, "promise me you will never speak of her to mamma? She is very angry with Dolores, and it hurts me so!"

"I will never mention her to Lady Dean; but how has she displeased your mother?"

"You know the Rector died, and it was discovered Dolores was not his child at all, but the daughter of a Mrs. Linley he had known a long time before."

"But that was not her fault!" said Rex, who had a great sense of justice. "Lady Dean could not be angry with her for that!"

"Oh, no; mother wanted her to come here and be my sister. Dr. Gray and his wife would have adopted her; and Mrs. Trafford, our old schoolmistress, found her a very comfortable situation in Paris, as governess."

"It seems to me she was a very fortunate young lady. Which of the offers did she accept?"

"Neither."

"Surely she did not persist in remaining with the Fanes?"

"Oh, no! She ran away!"

Rex smiled as he listened to May's version of the story. Was the poor little ne'er-do-well destined to such a wretched married life as had been Gertrude's? Dolores had injured him cruelly, and yet he would have given half his fortune to know that all was well with her. He told May very simply, he would never mention Dolores to her mother, and that when May should be Lady Carlyon he would offer no opposition to their meeting (though he felt it would be passing strange if Dolores cared to enter any house of his), and then he urged her to try and forget the sad mystery of her friend's disappearance, and to talk of happier things.

Lady Dean was delighted to welcome Lord Carlyon, and equally so to receive May's blushing confession. The peer and his future mother-in-law had a long, private interview, at which it was decided for the wedding to be at Easter.

"I have a horror of long engagements," said Rex, with a shudder, which Lady Dean understood; "and I think May looks very delicate. Why should not my care of her commence at once? We are too old friends, Lady Dean, for you to doubt I will cherish her tenderly!"

"I would rather trust to you than to anyone in the world, and—I will confess it—I have been very anxious about her lately. Ever since Dolores Linley's disgraceful flight she has drooped like a fading flower."

"I have promised May not to discuss Miss Linley's conduct," said Rex, simply. "She seems to cling to her friend very loyally. I confess, to me there is something touching in such perfect faith. I believe my own opinion of the girl coincides with yours, but I shall never try to influence May."

"You never liked Dolores," said Lady Dean, with a well-satisfied air. "I remember that well. Perhaps you saw through her all along?"

"I never liked her."

It was perfectly true. One half of their acquaintance he had detested the little ne'er-do-well; the other he had passionately loved her.

Far away in London the announcement of Lord Carlyon's wedding was read with feverish eagerness by a girl who daily spent a penny

from her scanty store to secure a sight of the first column of the *Times*. Dolores Linley breathed a prayer for May's happiness even as she read the lines which made her love for Rex a sin. At least May had not suffered, and, as to herself, it seemed to Dolores she had grown used to pain.

Dolores possessed one gift her detractors at Mitford had never realised; she was very practical. She might not be able to keep up the discipline of a village school, or make garments out of (nearly) nothing; but she could see things as clearly as most people, and form a very fair judgment of them.

When she reached London she had only the contents of a small black bag and three pounds in money. Even if she found Mrs. Babbage at once it must be some time before she was in regular employment, therefore she must eke out her scanty means as long as possible. She had arrived early in the day—it was not much after two o'clock—and a friendly porter having recommended the Vauxhall Bridge Road as cheap and respectable, Dolores plodded wearily along its pavement until she discovered a bedroom rather high up, decidedly small, and with very scanty furniture, which could be hired for the modest sum of six shillings a week!

She paid the rent a month in advance, feeling she, thereby, not only secured a roof over her head, whatever happened, but enlisted the landlady's good offices. She left her bag, went to a baker's shop and bought a bun, for she had tasted nothing, and felt ready to sink. Among the few papers given to Dolly by Dr. Gray, as Mr. Fane's executor, was a letter from an old friend of her mother's, assuring her of her help and friendship. It was to the address contained in this letter that she now set out to find. It was a kind of agency office, and the clerk stared at her, when she said frankly she wanted the address of someone who was known there nineteen years before; but the office was respectable, and the young man civil, besides rather feeling his business credit was at stake. So it ended in his giving Dolores a chair while he hunted about among some very dusty volumes, and at last produced one for the year in question. A brief survey of this made him retire to consult with his superior officer, who himself came forward, and, eyeing Dolores not unkindly, inquired if Mrs. Babbage were any relation of hers?

"Not at all; but she was my mother's friend. If you would read this letter you would understand. She asked my mother to come to her, not specially when she wrote, but at any time."

"Just like Susan Babbage," said the man—he must have been sixty turned. "She'd have died a rich woman if she hadn't been so fond of helping other people; but, my dear, you've come too late. She's been under the turf a good ten years herself!"

The blank look of dismay on Dolores' face romed his pity.

"If you wanted to go on the boards I might be able to help you to an engagement. I don't suppose you know much about acting; but you're young, and what the press calls of good appearance."

"My mother was an actress," said Dolores, simply, "only she never got on, and I don't think I should ever do much myself; but I have a good memory, and that is something."

The elderly man stared.

"Most young ladies think themselves Ophelia or Juliet at the least. Your modesty is rare! I suppose you have studied a few parts?"

"I never saw a play in my life!"

But her face and figure were charming, and her voice clear and distinct. Mr. Gibbs found no difficulty in getting her an engagement at eighteen shillings a week to act the walking lady at a very humble Theatopian resort.

Dolores had refused eighty guineas a year as a governess! Her musical talents would have secured her pupils at handsome payments had they only been known; but Dolores had felt no sacrifice would be complete if she left any clue by which the Deans or Lord Carlyon could trace her. And in cutting her

self off from all Blankshire friends she passed to that stage of womanhood to whom all private employment is forbidden. She, like many another gently-cultivated girl, was shut out from those of her own sphere, because she had "no references!"

Her really brilliant abilities suffered from the load of grief at her heart, and perhaps, too, from hard and insufficient fare.

She accomplished all the manager of the Paragon required of her, and she looked the levellest vision on his boards.

An then, with the April sunshine, came the news of Lord Carlyon's wedding.

Dolores felt then her sacrifice had not been in vain—at least May was happy. She had no present to send Lord Carlyon's bride—no money to purchase the humblest offering. But she knew May loved her, that not even Reginald's influence would make her think harshly of her playmate; and so Dolores severed one of her soft golden-brown tresses, and, sitting down, wrote a few lines of eager wishes for May's happiness.

She sent the letter with the pathetic gift to Carlyon Manor. Perhaps she judged Lady Dean might intercept it if it went to the Court, but the hardest heart would surely have melted at those few lines.

"Dearest, you are happy! I read in the paper that your heart's wish had been given you. I could not be with you as we planned; but, May, no one in the world could have wished more for your happiness than I. You'll believe me, dear, won't you? I send you a lock of my hair. It will remind you of me, even if we never meet again. Heaven bless you, May!"

Not an allusion to her own lonely life. Not a hint of all that she was suffering. No single word that could be construed into a prayer for pity.

Reginald Carlyon read that letter at his wife's wish, and for the first time since she cast him off felt a doubt as to the little ne'er-do-well's treachery.

"May," he said, quite suddenly, as he gave her back the letter, "did Dolores attach any morbid fancy to her mother having been an actress? Is it possible she hid herself from all her friends just because she thought they would look down on her?"

"She could not think that, Rex! Mother wrote to her Miss Linley should be quite as dear to her as Dolores Fane. Besides, Dr. Gray told her her father was a gentleman of good family!"

"Did she ever speak to you about it?"

"I never saw her afterwards."

"I don't understand. Didn't she hear the news of her parentage while she was with you?"

"Oh, no! She left the Court the very same day you went to London. Dear Dolly, I never thought it was our last talk together. I always like to remember her, Rex, as she was then. She had just come in from a long, lonely walk in the grounds, and she looked beaming with happiness."

It had not been a lonely walk, but the one in which he offered her his love. Strange that she should have returned "beaming with happiness," if, as she said, she had only lured him on to propose to her out of revenge!

"And what did you talk about, May?" He hardly knew why he asked the question.

Lady Carlyon hesitated.

"I hardly like to tell you."

"Is it your secret, or your friends'?"

"Mine; but I can trust you, Rex. You will never despise me!"

"Never, my darling!"

"Well, I had just heard you were going to London, and, you know, I thought of Mrs. Carlyon as well and strong; and I could not help thinking her beauty would take you from me—and, oh, I loved you so! Even then, Rex, I felt it would break my heart to lose you, and it was very weak and foolish of me. I was crying, and Dolly asked me what was the matter!"

"And you told her?"

"I could not help it. Oh, Rex, do you despise me? It seemed to me that you had gone for ever, and that no time would bring you back to me; but Dolly knew better." She was so bright and hopeful she made me cheerful in spite of myself."

"So bright and hopeful," when her heart must have been pierced by every word!

A veil seemed to fall from Reginald Carlyon's eyes. He began to understand; all that had puzzled him was becoming clear.

"And did Dolores share your fears of poor Gertrude's fascinations?" he asked, gravely, as his wife paused.

"Oh, no! She said I was not to think about it; but I was very foolish, Rex. I told her I felt that I should lose you, and my heart would break the day I heard your wedding bells."

May did not look at her husband's face as he left the room, or she must have seen the agony written on it.

Carlyon felt at that moment as though he had been an idiot ever to have doubted Dolores, and yet, as he thought over the crisis of his life, he saw she had planned this very result.

May was her friend, her more than sister. They both loved Reginald. Only one could be happy, and Dolores had elected that one should not be herself.

The strong, loving woman's heart had been ready to sacrifice all, and to take upon itself all the suffering, so that little child-like May might never know a pang—it was all clear to him now.

And he was powerless to help her. Even if he knew where she was he could not stretch out his hand to her in friendship. They had loved each other too well ever to meet without danger to May's peace.

The poor little ne'er-do-well had gone out of their lives, and he might not—he dared not—attempt to find her.

CHAPTER VII.

Mrs. Fane prospered, in spite of her bereavement, in a mild sort of way. There are some women who never meet with enemies, perhaps because they are too weak-minded and colourless for anyone to be jealous of them.

She never troubled herself about the girl whom for so many years she had regarded as her first-born.

Sir Geoffrey, when he learned from Reginald Carlyon the true circumstances of Dolores leaving Blankshire (how she had gone—not to a comfortable situation—but had vanished like a fugitive), at once returned to England, and sought her anxiously.

Rex never told him of his own discovery about the little ne'er-do-well until one winter's day, when the blinds were lowered at Lord Carlyon's London house, and Sir Geoffrey Dean arrived post-haste from Blankshire to try to comfort his brother-in-law for May's loss.

The sacrifice had not been in vain. Never wife was happier or more cherished than May Carlyon; and when she died, with her hand in her husband's, her last words to him were she had been so happy.

"You will find Dolly some day," whispered the girl-wife, as she said good-bye to her darling. "I know you will see her some day. Tell her then, please, I was very happy!"

Reginald bent over her tenderly. It seemed to him a blight fell on every creature who loved him, and yet he knew full well the doom of an early grave had been feared for May from childhood.

"I will tell Dolores," he answered, gently; "and I will give her your dear love, May, and say that you believed in her always."

"Always," answered Lady Carlyon, simply. "And, Rex, I wish you had liked her too!"

"Why?"

"You will be so lonely when I am gone,"

said May, wistfully. "Men don't care much for little children. It will be years before baby is much to you, and Dolly would have loved her so."

Three hours later Sir Geoffrey arrived to find that his sister was dead, and a tiny baby was all that was left to Reginald of his married life.

Lord Carlyon told Geoff May's last words; and then, impelled by a nameless something stronger than himself, he poured out the whole history of his romance.

"At least your sister was happy, Geoff!" he said, pleadingly. "She never guessed the past; but I—I bring a blight on all I love, for my wife is dead, and Dolores is homeless and friendless."

"Nonsense!" said Sir Geoffrey, sharply. "You talk morbidly, Rex. Dolores acted nobly, and I am proud of my little friend. As for May," his voice faltered, "she was very happy, poor child, and she never dreamed the price of her happiness. Rex, I cannot mourn for her. Her life was all sunshine, and she has passed away before she dreamed she was not your heart's choice. You have nothing to reproach yourself with. Anyone would have acted as you did, and believed Dolly as heartless as her letter represented. I am glad you have told me."

"I should have thought you would hate me!"

"You have given me the missing link in her story. I knew she loved someone, and that she would never marry him. Did you ever hear, Rex, the old busybodies in Blankshire used to compare the poor child to a brand snatched from the burning, and say if she was ever saved it would be by a fiery trial? I don't think there are many girls who would have passed through such an ordeal as she did, and have acted so nobly!"

"Has your mother forgiven her?"

"Yes. My mother has been very different since her last illness, Rex. I think she has come round to dear old Dr. Gray's opinion at last, that Dolores could explain everything if only we could find her."

"It is months now, Geoff, since you started on the quest. Have you never found a clue?"

Geoff shook his head.

"She had been gone nearly six months when I returned to England. Only think of all that might happen in six months! I have consulted the cleverest lawyers of the day. I have kept a famous detective at work; but nothing has come of it—nothing at all!"

"You have never heard the faintest rumour of her being seen?"

"Never. The postmark on the letter she sent poor little May proves she was in London last April; but just think how long that is ago! I got a letter (through my detective's inquiries) from an old Vicar in Devonshire, who declares Dolores must be his grandchild. It seems he discarded his son because he went on the stage, and, repenting his harshness, would gladly have received the poor fellow's widow and orphan had he only known of their existence. That letter, Rex, is the only result of nine months' search."

"She must be dead!"

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"I have the strangest fancy that Dolores, brave as she is, would shrink from dying without one friendly face near her. She is very proud, and would take nothing of us in health; but I believe, if she knew her end was near, she would turn to her old friends. Besides, Rex, it is a romantic notion; you may call it superstitious, but I believe I must know when she died. I loved her ever since she was ten years old, and I think something would tell me if she had been taken from me!"

Lord Carlyon's little daughter was christened May, and confided to her grandmother's care while her father went abroad.

(Continued on page 284.)

KENNETH'S CHOICE

By Florence Hodgkinson

(Author of "Dolly's Legacy," "Ivy's Peril," "Guy Forester's Secret," &c., &c.)

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

In the prologue we are told how Andrew Gordon came to be arrested for the suspected murder of his old master, Mr. Treviyn, of Treviyn and Marks, and that the sudden shock caused his death the same night that he was arrested. Andrew Gordon was living in the East End of London at the time, and a few days before his arrest had taken as lodger Margaret Lyon, with her child. It so happened that Andrew recognised Margaret as having called upon Mr. Treviyn. Both women have lost their husbands, and each is left with a young child.

Twenty years have gone by, and Lord Combermere, conscious of his approaching end, has named Kenneth St. Clune (who succeeds to the title) heir to the vast estate of Combermere on condition that he marries, on or before her twenty-first birthday, Margaret Helene, only child of Noel St. Clune. Kenneth has no intention of allowing himself to be coerced into marrying a woman he has never seen.

Nell Marsh, one of a poor but proud family, determines to try and earn her own living, and makes the acquaintance of Bruce Carew, an artist at the top of his profession, who offers her employment as an artist's model. Nell's sister, Quentin, has become secretly betrothed to Austin Brooks, but on learning that she is a St. Clune and with the possibility of becoming Lady Combermere, poor Austin is neglected; but he is so blindly in love that he does not see the change in her.

It is becoming more and more clear that Kenneth takes more than a friendly interest in Nell; and the proud and ambitious Quentin is treated very distantly. The time is fast approaching when, unless Kenneth carries out the conditions of Lord Combermere's will, he will remain a comparatively poor man.

CHAPTER X.

KENNETH would have done anything in his power to avoid that meeting. At the very moment of discovery he was hopelessly in love with little Nell. There was something peculiarly trying in being brought suddenly face to face with the girl whose suitor public opinion, his own interests, and the wishes of all his friends demanded him to become.

She was looking very lovely—he saw that at a glance. It was more than a year since his visit to Marden. Margaret St. Clune had changed from an unformed and rather opinionated girl into an elegant and graceful woman. Before she had jarred on Kenneth horribly; now he was forced to confess her manners were perfect, only with very perversity of human nature they could never charm him as Nell's simple ways and wistful glances had done.

Margaret had thrown aside her mourning, and wore a spring toilet whose prevailing tint was cream, while knots of ruby-coloured velvet contrasted well with that delicate colour, and were just the thing to set off her vivid, sparkling black eyes and raven hair. But for that fatal will Kenneth could gladly have been proud of his kinswoman. Even had the late Earl left all he possessed to his grandchild Ken would have borne her no malice. It was the knowing all London had linked their names together, the consciousness that he was expected to marry her, which made all intercourse with Miss St. Clune distasteful to her cousin.

"My dear boy, how ill you look!" cried Lady Combermere, after an anxious look at her favourite, and then the dear old lady wondered if he had been burning the midnight oil in fruitless attempts to produce some brilliant book which should mend his fallen fortunes; or if—she shuddered at the bare idea—he had been trying to drown his bitter disappointment in the gaieties and dissipation to be found in the bright French capital.

"I?" said Ken, laughing. "Why, Aunt Lucy, I never was better. Where are you staying? I should have been to find you out, but I only returned to England three days ago."

"We are in Cadogan Place," said the Countess. "I have taken a house for the

season. You must come and lunch with us, Ken; I want you and Margaret to know each other."

Lord Combermere smiled; it was not in his nature to be anything but courteous to a woman. Margaret St. Clune saw the smile, and gave to it and the words which followed a meaning far stronger than was intended by the speaker.

"I shall be delighted, Aunt Lucy! When a man has as few relations as I have, a new one is an acquisition, even were she other than the beauty of the season."

Lunch was a pleasant meal under Lady Combermere's rule. When it was over the three sat in the pleasant, flower-scented drawing-room, and Ken told the ladies of his wanderings; but he never mentioned the apartments in the Rue St. Marie, or the girl who had caught his heart in the rebound.

"And you actually spent six weeks in Paris?" said the Countess, in surprise. "Why, you used to say you hated it!"

"I met some pleasant friends."

Lady Combermere looked at him keenly, as though to acquire the gender of the friends.

"Mr. Carew, the famous artist," explained Lord Combermere. "He was very kind to me when I was a lad; and we are always glad to see each other now."

The name conveyed no meaning to Miss St. Clune; she never remembered anything that did not concern herself. Of course, Nell had told her the name and profession of Mrs. Ainslie's brother, but both had been forgotten as soon as heard. She had not taken much interest in the Academy. She had accompanied her grandmother, because it seemed "the fashion" to go, and every one asked her whether she had been; but she had not troubled herself to look at a half a dozen pictures—in fact, she had studied ladies' dresses—while the Countess enjoyed the exhibition, and perhaps regretted, in her kindly heart, how very few tastes she had in common with her husband's grandchild.

Lady Combermere brightened strangely when Kenneth mentioned Bruce Carew. She explained she had known him well before her marriage, and had been delighted that morning by his last picture.

"It is his chief *d'œuvre*, Ken. I never saw anything like it. The girl's face is perfect! It almost made me cry!"

"It does not do her justice!" said Lord Combermere, dreamily, and without recollecting all the words betrayed.

"You can't have seen the picture I mean, Kenneth! It is not a portrait, but a scene from the 'Idylls of the King.'"

"I know," said Kenneth, recalled to prudence; "but for all that, Aunt Lucy, it is a portrait. It was no professional model who sat for it, but a young lady in whom Carew is much interested!"

"Oh!" said Lady Combermere, in a voice that spoke volumes, "a *protégée*, I suppose?"

"A *protégée*, of his sister's. The Ainslies have no children, and so they adopted her."

He looked on the ground, for he did not want to meet Miss St. Clune's eyes. He saw her colour rise, and noticed that the trifle of fancy work in her hand dropped to the ground. Lady Combermere was quite unconscious of the drama going on under her eyes, and said quietly,

"I should like to see her very much!"

This was Margaret's opportunity.

"It would be a pity to unsettle her mind with notices," she said calmly. "People in her position are so easily spoilt by attention from any of their superiors!"

Lord Combermere could have shaken the heiress with pleasure. He perfectly longed to

set her down, but he knew it was best to keep silence, and leave the reply to the Countess. She was evidently annoyed. In truth, there were times when Margaret made such ill-bred remarks that her grandmother sat on thorns, and wondered such a lovely face could be united to a mind of such narrow, inferior type. Now she only said quietly—

"I think you misunderstood my nephew, Margaret. He told us the young lady (a slight stress on the word) who sat for Mr. Carew's picture was his sister's adopted child!"

"Artists are nobody!" returned Margaret. "They work hard enough for their living!"

"They are the aristocracy of genius!" replied Lady Combermere. "Bruce Carew's name is famous throughout the world. There is no city that would not be honoured by his presence. I knew his sister as a girl, and she could have married anyone, but she was in love with a friend of her brother's; she married him, and went abroad. I have never heard of them since!"

"They live at Fulham," explained Kenneth. "I don't think they care for regular society. Mrs. Ainslie is very pretty and delicate; her husband and daughter wait on her hand and foot. You couldn't fancy them rushing about to parties and balls, or going through the fatigues of a London season; but for all that they are the equals in refinement of any people I ever met, and so I don't think your notice would have such a terrible effect on Miss Ainslie as my cousin fears."

Margaret left the room as soon as she could after this speech, and the silence which followed her exit was very hard to break. Poor Kenneth sat and thought what remark would be safe and not unkind; but he felt almost dazed, and at last he said absently:

"I suppose she takes after her mother. She is not in the least like the St. Clunes."

"Her father had dark hair. What do you think of her, Kenneth?"

It was the question he had dreaded and which he would so fain have avoided, but what was he to do? There sat the Countess awaiting his reply, and a reply of some kind he had to make.

"She is very handsome!"

"Yes, isn't she?"

"You wrote to me she was much admired. When am I going to be appealed to in my capacity of guardian by some happy lover?"

The Countess sighed.

"I am so glad you have come home, Kenneth. She has had three proposals already. I grew so afraid you would come too late!"

"And what did she say to the three proposals?"

"Declined them at once. I am quite sure she is heart whole and fancy free; and if you would only bring yourself to think of it!"

"My dear Aunt Lucy, if I prefer freedom and poverty will you be angry?"

"I shall be disappointed!"

"You see I am old-fashioned, and I believe in marrying for love!"

"And you have not forgotten Miss Dean?"

"Mrs. Barber," corrected the Earl. "No, I have not forgotten her, Aunt Lucy, but I assure you her memory does not stand between me and your wishes."

"What then?"

"I am not sure it would be pleasant to have a wife so much richer than myself. Besides, Miss St. Clune has a very exalted idea of her own importance. She might be telling me some day my wealthy marriage had 'quite unsettled me, and turned my head,' and I couldn't stand that!"

"Ken, it is unkind to notice that unlucky speech."

"Is she given to such speeches?"

"No, poor child, there are great allowances to be made for her! Think of her bringing up!"

Kenneth started. He had never seen Mrs. Marsh, but he had heard her praises sung by Mr. Ashwin. He had seen one girl she had



"I ALLUDE TO THE MURDER OF MY STEP-FATHER. DON'T YOU REMEMBER YOU GAVE ME YOUR OPINION ABOUT IT?" SAID KENNETH.

"brought up," and certainly no fault could be found with her training. It was in his mind to tell the Countess the fault was not in the poor widow's efforts, but in the soil she had to work on, but Ken hated to vex people, and so he kept back the retort.

"It would have been far better if she had come to us sooner," pursued Lady Combermere; "but I suppose the poor woman meant it for the best, and no doubt the money was useful to her!"

"What money?" Very, very stern was the young Earl's tone.

"Why, you know she received five pounds a month!"

"Mrs. Marsh received five pounds a month from Mr. Ashwin, because her husband was in his employment at the time of his death. The money had nothing whatever to do with her foster-child. Indeed, Ashwin told me himself he advised her to send it to the workhouse. The widow's sole income was this five pounds a month. She had a child of her own to support, and it seems to me the noblest charity which made her share her pittance with an orphan who had no claim on her."

Lady Combermere looked troubled.

"Are you sure of this?"

"Positive! Surely Ashwin might have told you, Aunt Lucy!"

"I have not seen Mr. Ashwin for a long time."

"Surely you have not quarrelled with him?"

"Oh, no! He manages all the business, and writes me the kindest letters. Now we are in London I hope to go and see him at the office, for he won't come here."

"Why not?"

The Countess evidently would rather not say, but Lord Combermere persisted.

"He does not get on with Margaret!" she

confessed at last. "He came to White Ladies just after you went abroad, and they did not agree at all. He reproved her because she spoke slightly of Miss Marsh, and she told him he did not treat her with the respect due to Lord Combermere's heiress. But for my entreaties he would have thrown up all the affairs of the estate. At last I got him to promise to continue our lawyer if I gave him my word never to subject him to a meeting with Margaret."

Kenneth smiled.

"And you still recommend me to marry her!"

"She is a dear girl!" said the Countess, who had made this statement so often she really believed it, "and most amiable so long as she is not thwarted. She has been much annoyed by Miss Marsh's neglect, and it was natural she should resent Mr. Ashwin's taking the girl's part against her. She really has behaved shamefully."

"What has she done?"

"Gone to live with quite common people who used to keep a little shop, and left all dear Meg's letters unanswered. I wrote myself once, Kenneth, telling her I should like to know her, and whenever she could spare a few weeks I should be pleased to welcome her at White Ladies. Would you believe it, Kenneth, my letter was returned to me torn down the middle, and indorsed in very bad writing, 'Miss Marsh wants nothing to do with stuck-up people!'"

A great struggle was going on in Kenneth's mind. Should he tell Lady Combermere the truth, that she was most cruelly deceived, and the girl she had been taught to look on as low-minded and half-educated was the sweet-faced model of the picture which had so delighted her?

But what could he gain by such a course?

It would grieve the Countess terribly, and make her relations with Miss Clune most uncomfortable; while as for Nell she wanted no notice or attention from these great ladies. She had a happy home, and was content. To what end should he bring his sweet spring flower beneath the glare and tumult of fashionable life? Besides—and his heart ached at the thought, knowing what he did of his own feelings—did not honour urge him to shun all meetings with little Nell, since she could never be more to him than a sweet child friend?

"Kenneth," interrupted the Countess, looking at him gravely, "I am quite sure you are not well!"

"You are mistaken, Aunt Lucy, I assure you."

"Then you are in trouble!"

This was true enough, but it was not trouble he could reveal to her, or to any human creature. It was a burden he must bear alone, even though its weight crushed him! Fortunately, Lady Combermere's suspicions all pointed to a different grief.

"I was so cut up for you, Ken, when I saw the announcement in the papers. To be engaged to you, and then to marry your uncle two months afterwards! It was monstrous!"

"She never was engaged to me."

"But it was just the same thing."

"Hardly. And, Aunt Lucy, I don't want you to be deceived, I have tried to be grateful to Miss Dean for her rejection. We should not have been happy together. Poor little thing! as she said herself, she was only a butterfly, and I should want something more than that in my wife. I loved Kathleen very truly, with the first wild passion of my youth; but I have tried to be thankful it came to nothing, and I can go and congratulate Uncle Jim without one envious thought. He wanted a pretty plaything, and he has it. I wanted

a companion—a second self—and pretty Katy could never be either."

Lady Combermere felt as if the world were coming to an end.

"I suppose I ought to be glad, but your feelings sound unnatural. And, oh, my dear! I have wasted so much pity on you."

"It was very kind of you."

"And now, my dear, what do you mean to do?"

"To do!" Ken looked astonished. "Oh, I shall stay in London till July. I'll come down to White Ladies then, if you are kind enough to invite me?"

"Of course; I shall be delighted to have you. But I want to know your plans?"

"I haven't got any."

"My dear boy! And you are twenty-five!"

"Twenty-six. I had a birthday last week."

"My dear Kenneth," cried the Countess, worried by his calm manner, "you must do something. You can't sit down with folded hands and try to subsist on three hundred a year!"

"I have subsisted on it in comfort for years. I don't think I'm idle, Aunt Lucy; but I shall never make a good barrister. Perhaps some day, when I have a friend in power, I may get some trifling appointment abroad—attachéship, or secretary, or something; but in the meantime I prefer to be as I am. Now and then I pick up a windfall by literature. I never had any extravagant tastes, and I don't owe a shilling in the world."

"And supposing you wanted to marry?"

"I shall not."

"There is no telling. You do do unexpected things." She could not help this little shot at his "getting over" Miss Dean's defection so thoroughly and so soon.

"If I married an heiress that would remedy all difficulties," said Ken, lightly. "How much longer grace have I, Aunt Lucy?"

"Margaret will be of age in September of next year," replied the Countess, gravely; "but I can't engage that she will wait all that time for you. I assure you she is very much admired, and any day she may accept someone." I have warned you, Kenneth, again and again. Delay is dangerous.

"I know," said poor Ken, gravely. "I think that time-honoured sentiment was the text of every letter I got from you abroad."

"Because I cannot bear to see you throw away your own prospects. You have to make your choice—wealth or poverty. Why can't you make up your mind?"

"I will try to soon," said the young man, warmly; "and however I decide, Aunt Lucy, I hope you will keep me a place in your affections. I would rather lose the Abbey than your kindness."

Her eyes glistened. She might try to love Margaret because she was Geoffrey's granddaughter, but for Kenneth the love came without trying; he was almost as dear to her as a son of her own.

Margaret was a little surprised to find her grandmother in tears.

"What is the matter?" and she kissed the Countess gently. "Do you really mean I have vexed you? You must make allowances for my past, grandmother; if I had always lived with you I should be a better girl."

"My dear, I am not vexed with you; but I am in great trouble about Kenneth."

"About Lord Combermere?" There was no mistaking her interest now. "Why, grandmother! Is he ill? or in trouble? or what?"

"He is quite well, and he says he is in no trouble, but I am worried about his future."

"His future!" exclaimed the heiress; "but I thought that was settled! With such a lovely home as Combermere Abbey he has nothing to do but take possession and enjoy life."

"My dear child, I have never answered your questions about Kenneth, but I think now it would be better for you to know. He is only master of the Abbey on one condition."

"And that is—?"

"That he marries you before your one-and-twentieth birthday!"

"And if I refuse the honour?"

"He takes the Abbey and half its revenues. Even then you would be a rich heiress!"

"And if Lord Combermere objects to me?"

"He remains as he is, an English Earl, with three hundred a year to maintain his title."

"I don't think it's fair!"

"My dear, it's no fault of yours, and whatever happens you are amply provided for."

Margaret was looking at the Countess with a strangely softened expression of face.

"I wish I had not said that!"

"What, child?"

"Before Lord Combermere about being rich. He will think I care for nothing but money!"

"Do you mind what he thinks?"

"He is my kinsman, and I don't want him to have a very bad opinion of me."

"He has not!"

Margaret looked her interest.

"He says you are far more beautiful than he expected. My dear, I have loved him almost as my own son, and you are very dear to me. Can you wonder that my great wish should be for the title and estates to be united by your marriage? And Kenneth is such a noble fellow—a king among men! If you married a duke I should not think you so fortunate as if you became my Kenneth's wife."

"I don't want to marry a duke, grandmother!" There was something in her heightened colour and softened expression which told the Countess her secret. Margaret St. Clune might be fond of money and what money bought, but no man had ever made such an impression on her fancy as Kenneth St. Clune!

"My dear!" said the Countess, very gently, "I have asked him to White Ladies in July, and while he is with us don't say anything to remind him of his poverty—for poverty it is, Margaret, compared to his expectations. When I die I shall leave him White Ladies and all I have. But I am only forty, and so it may be a long time before he enjoys his legacy!"

"He would not enjoy it if you were dead. I am sure he is very fond of you; and, grandmother, I am very glad he is coming to stay with us."

She ran away quickly then, but the Countess understood all her words implied. She on her part was not averse to follow the mandates of her grandfather's will, and Lady Combermere saw it would only rest with himself for Kenneth to become, in truth, master of the Abbey.

In her own room Margaret St. Clune flung herself on the sofa and sobbed as though her very heart would break.

"Nell was right," she thought, sorrowfully. "There is such a thing as love. I used to say if only one was rich nothing else mattered. Well, I am richer than I ever dreamed of. I am the beauty of the London season. I could have married over and over again, and yet—I would give it all up. I would go back to the old life at Marden and be Queenie Marsh again—thankfully—ay, gladly—if I could only by the sacrifice have Kenneth St. Clune's love. A king among men grandmother calls him! Well, I know he is my king, and has been ever since that day—a year ago—when he came to the cottage with that hateful old lawyer!"

"I thought it was ambition, that I wanted to be a Countess, that I wished to be mistress of that grand old Abbey; but I hear now Kenneth is a poor man—I should enjoy the Abbey and its revenues even if I remained Miss St. Clune. Other titles as old as his have been offered me, so that this strange passion which has crept into my heart must be love! Love! love for Kenneth St. Clune, my knight, my hero! Poor Austin Brooks told me once I did not know what love was! I know now, and for all time my love is Kenneth's."

And she spoke the simple truth. She was incapable of a pure, self-sacrificing affection; but, nevertheless, it was true passionate love she felt for Kenneth. As his wife, an inward voice whispered, she would be a better woman. With his love to soften her heart she would want nothing else that earth could give. Riches, honours, popularity, she would have trampled them all under foot to have now her hero's love!

"And I shall win it!" she cried, in a voice broken by passionate sobs. "It is the prize I have set my heart on, and I will gain it, no matter at what cost!—no matter what barriers I have to break down, what difficulties I have to conquer! Grandmother knows all his secrets, and she says his heart is free! I know there was a flirtation with that pretty little doll, Mrs. Barber, but I can afford not to be jealous of her. I have read any woman can win any man so that he is not already in love with someone else, so I shall win Kenneth. Mother often told us how I had always managed to get my own way from a little child. Well, I had never wished for anything then as I yearn now for Kenneth's love, so it is not likely I shall fail!"

And while the beautiful heiress dreamed of victory, the man who all unconsciously was her hero had gone down to the Temple, and asked for Mr. Ashwin.

"I was just leaving," said the old lawyer. "Come home and dine with me, if an Earl will condescend to a homely six o'clock meal!"

"I shall be delighted. I have a great deal to say to you. I want your advice about a very delicate matter."

But he was backward in asking for it, or else he felt the subject was such an unpleasant one it would spoil their dinner. At last he summoned up his courage and looked straight into his friend's face and asked suddenly,

"What is your opinion of Miss St. Clune?"

Poor Mr. Ashwin felt taken aback. As a man and an individual he almost detested the young lady; as a lawyer and a real friend of Lord Combermere's he felt it his duty to advise his client to marry her, therefore his answer was slow and guarded.

"A very handsome girl!"

"Nonsense!" said Ken, pleasantly, "don't fence with me, Mr. Ashwin. You have known me all my life, and I think you owe me a frank answer. What is your opinion of Miss St. Clune?"

"How do you mean?"

"Is she sincere and amiable, patient, gentle, and forbearing?"

"I have only seen her twice, and—I will confess it—I took an unmitigated dislike to her. But, for all that, Lord Combermere, she is very attractive, and would grace any position. I think your best course would be to propose to her at once."

"There is one excellent reason against it."

"And that?"

"In your own words: 'I have only seen her twice, and—I will confess it—I took an unmitigated dislike to her.'"

"I am sorry for it."

"I don't want to make protestations, Ashwin. I may grow worldly wise, and remember that only as Margaret St. Clune's husband can I be Combermere of Combermere Abbey; but my present sentiments are—I'd not marry my cousin if she were the only woman in Europe."

"I am sorry to hear it. But your decision is not needed for over a year. What do you want my advice about, Lord Combermere? I had fancied it might be to ask me to draw your marriage settlements."

"Oh, no!"

"What then?"

"I'm afraid you will laugh at me; but I have been thinking a great deal of a conversation we had just after poor cousin Geoffrey's funeral."

"I fancy we had several conversations just then, Lord Combermere."

He had no idea what the young Earl was alluding to, and wanted to get him to speak plainly, but Kenneth's reply was the last that he had expected.

"I allude to the murder of my step-father. Don't you remember you gave me your opinion about it?"

"Very possibly."

"Mr. Ashwin, I have set my heart on sifting the matter thoroughly, and causing the truth to be discovered."

"You had far better not. Most people believe all was plain enough, and Gordon the undoubted murderer. I doubt if four people in London questioned his guilt. The poor fellow has been dead nineteen years; his widow has followed him, and their child is adopted by a wealthy couple. I can't see any possible good in opening the whole matter again."

"But if I am set on it would you refuse to help me?"

"Unless I saw any reason for the caprice." "I cannot explain my reasons to you, Mr. Ashwin; but you have known me from my childhood. You will admit my word is to be trusted?"

"I hope you did not think I questioned that," said Ashwin, warmly. "I would take your word before another man's bond. All the St. Clunes are as true as steel."

"Then listen to me. I have the most solemn, the most urgent, reasons for insisting to clear up the mystery of Marks's murder."

"Do you want to find the spoil?—the money deposited in the iron box, and which has never been heard of since? My dear Lord Combermere, remember it was all in gold and notes (notes whose payment could not be stopped, as no one had a list of the numbers). The money was spent within a year of the murder, depend upon that."

Kenneth sighed. It seemed pitiful such a low, worldly motive could be ascribed to him.

"Mr. Ashwin, it is not a question of money. I tell you the happiness of my life is at stake. If I could discover the truth about that murder, I should rid my soul of a nightmare."

"I don't like the idea. Whatever put it in your head? Have you been brooding about it all the while you were abroad?"

"It never came into my head until to-day."

"A sudden whim!"

"It is not a whim; it is sober earnest."

A light seemed to break upon the lawyer.

"Have you seen your mother?"

"No. I have seen and heard nothing of her for months. Is she in town?"

"Yes; and I had a note from her this morning, asking me to go there. When I arrived she was in strong hysterics, and could see no one!"

"She never had hysterics to my knowledge."

"Her companion could explain nothing to me, except that Mrs. Marks had become subject to fits of nervous depression and fright; of their cause she had no idea. It flashed on me, when you spoke, your mother might have got heavily into debt, and your desire to sift the mystery of her husband's murder spring from a wish to find the money, and so help her!"

"I had no idea there was anything wrong. I don't think it can be debt. She has made wretched investments at times, and so sadly reduced her income, but she is otherwise a good woman of business—far too fond of getting things cheap and making 'bargains,' as she calls them, to be likely to run bills which entail long prices!"

"Well, there is something very wrong, I'm afraid. A healthy woman like your mother doesn't suddenly go like this without some real cause. I think I have her note in my pocket. I obeyed the summons very promptly, because the wording of it alarmed me. It was so unlike her usual diction."

He handed it to Ken.

"Dear Mr. Ashwin.—Can you come to me at once? I am almost distraught with misery! If you are prompt you may save me from Bedlam.—Yours sincerely, "A MARKS."

Poor Kenneth looked bewildered. He read the few lines again and again, but he could not understand them.

Reperusal made their meaning no clearer, and at last he gave back the little sheet of perfumed paper to the lawyer with the inquiry:

"What can it mean?"

"I thought money, but if she is not in debt it can't be that. Her present investments are as safe as the funds. I really don't know what to suggest. I left word with Miss Taylor (the companion) to telegraph to me to-morrow at what hour I could see Mrs. Marks, as I didn't want another useless journey. Still, a son can take more on him than a lawyer; and I really think, whether they send for me or not, you should go down and investigate the matter. That some calamity has befallen your mother, from Miss Taylor's testimony, is most certain."

"Has she no suspicions?"

"None. She declares the change began a week ago, and that since then Mrs. Marks has seemed like a woman under a living dread. She is always gazing into space, as though she saw something near her no other eyes could perceive. Miss Taylor says it makes her blood run cold to watch her, and it was at her earnest entreaty Mrs. Marks sent to me!"

"It is barely eight," said Ken, thoughtfully, taking out his watch, "and a cab would take me there in a few minutes. I think if you will excuse me, Mr. Ashwin, I will go over at once. My mother and I may not strike people as a model parent and son, but I can't bear the idea of her being in this state unknown to me."

"The best thing you can do. I'll send for a cab (which he did), and, Lord Combermere, I'll think over that other matter carefully, and talk to you about it some other time."

"Thanks; I shall look in at the office to-morrow to report how I found my mother," and then Ken sprang into the hansom, and was wheeled away to the house where his mother lived, but which never, even in his childhood's days, had seemed to him his home.

As a fact, he had never lived very much with his mother. From the time of Lucy Talbot's becoming Lady Combermere his holidays had been spent chiefly at the Abbey, where he settled in those chambers before referred to. He often ran over to his mother's to dine, but never remained the night.

It must have been four or five years since he had slept under her roof. Under these circumstances, he was hardly likely to know much of her companions (we speak in the plural number, for Mrs. Marks usually changed the young lady appointed to that office two or three times a year).

In the present case, however, Kenneth knew the lady in question intimately. She had been his playmate long ago, when her father was rector of Combermere.

The Countess herself had recommended Miss Taylor to Mrs. Marks, and with such a successful result that Emily had already been six months with her employer, and had not yet managed to displease her.

As he was driven to his mother's the young Earl took comfort from the thought that he could thoroughly trust Miss Taylor.

She was twenty-two, bright, active, and clever, but steady and thoughtful beyond her years. Whatever she told him of Mrs. Marks's state might be relied on.

But he was hardly prepared for her greeting. She opened the door herself, and her first words were:

"Thank Heaven you are come!"

"Did you expect me? I am here by the merest chance. I was dining with Ashwin, and his account of the mother alarmed me."

"He told me you were in town, and I telegraphed to your chambers."

"I have been out all day, and so missed

your message. What is the matter, Emily?"

"I don't know."

"But you must have some idea! I suppose it is some sudden shock?"

"A fright, I think. Mrs. Marks won't tell the doctor or anybody exactly what has happened. She is always begging us to protect her. At last I told her I had sent for you, and she has been calmer ever since."

Mrs. Marks was on the sofa in her own sitting-room. Kenneth was horror-stricken at the change in her. She looked as one who had been ill for weeks.

The hand she gave him was cold as ice, and he had to bend over her to catch her trembling words.

"Kenneth—protect me! Kenneth—send it away!"

"My dear mother," said the young man, soothingly, "of course I will protect you! What is it I am to send away?"

Her eyes wandered furtively round the room.

"There is no one here but Emily and me," said Kenneth, reassuringly, "and you can trust us both. Only tell us what is frightening you?"

But both thought the poor brain must have lost its balance when her answer came. It seemed to them the ravings of a mind diseased.

"My husband's ghost!"

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2010. Back numbers can be obtained through any News-agent.)

THE MURMUR OF A WATERFALL.

The murmur of a waterfall

A mile away,

The rustle when a robin lights

Upon a spray,

The lapping of a lowland stream

On dripping boughs,

The sound of grazing from a herd

Of gentle cows,

The echo from the wooded hill

Of cuckoo's call,

The quiver through the meadow grass

At evening fall:—

Too subtle are these harmonies

For pen and rule;

Such music is not understood

By any school;

But when the brain is overwrought

It hath a spell,

Beyond all human skill and power

To make it well.

The memory of a kindly word

For long gone by,

The fragrance of a fading flower

Sent lovingly,

The gleaming of a sudden smile

Or sudden tear,

The warmer pressure of the hand,

The tone of cheer,

The hush that means "I cannot speak,

But I have heard!"

The note that only bears a verse

From God's own Word:—

Such tiny things we hardly count

As ministry;

The givers deeming they have shown

Scant sympathy;

But when the heart is overwrought,

Oh! who can tell

The power of such tiny things

To make it well?

—Francis Ridley Havergal.

HER WISH WAS GRATIFIED.—Servant (from next door): "Please, mum, misses sends her compliments, and will you let your daughter sing and play the organ this afternoon?"

Lady: "Why, most certainly. Tell your mistress I am glad she likes it."

Servant: "Oh, it isn't that, mum; she's expecting the landlord, and she wants some excuse for to give notice."

THE GOLDEN HOPE

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

Lady Redwoode, the owner and undisputed proprietor of all the fair domain of Redwoode, has been left a widow a year or more previous to the opening of the story. Lord Redwoode left no heir, but expressed a wish that on the decease of his wife the estates should pass to their nephew, Andrew Forsythe, and never doubted Lady Redwoode's compliance with his wishes. Mr. Forsythe was musing over many things, and wondering what would happen to him should his aunt marry again. Judge then of his surprise when Lady Redwoode tells him the story of her early life. Secretly married when quite a girl, in order not to arouse the anger of her brother, with whom she was living in India, there came a day when it was necessary to tell all, and the scene that followed caused Lady Redwoode to fall into convulsions, and she lay ill for many weeks. On returning to life and consciousness, it was to find herself a widow and a mother.

Sir Richard Haughton, although but twenty-seven, has lost all joy in life through an unhappy marriage. News is brought to him that his divorced wife, Margaret Strel, is dying, and the messenger eagerly begs an interview on the pretext that Margaret desires Sir Richard's forgiveness. Margaret fails to rekindle the old love, and swears that no other woman shall ever become his wife.

Now Lady Redwoode's brother is dead, and as an act of reparation has sent all the necessary proofs of her first marriage, but the secret of the identity of her own child lies with him. The two girls are coming to England, and it is for Lady Redwoode to discover which of the two is her daughter. After a little hesitation in coming to so momentous a decision, the choice falls on Cecile, who at once sets to work to ingratiate herself with Lady Redwoode at the expense of her foster-sister Hellice, and in this she is ably seconded by the Hindoo ayah. Cecile's relationship is proclaimed to the assembled household; and to Hellice, who watches this rejoicing without one pang of envy, there suddenly comes a feeling of loneliness, and she turns unobserved into the garden to seek comfort among the shade of the trees. It is thus that she discovers Sir Richard Haughton, who for one moment gazes on the lovely vision ere it is lost to view. "I must see her again," he says. "Whoever and whatever she is I recognise her as my fate."

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

SHE did so, and her summons was answered by the appearance of Mr. Andrew Forsythe, whose attire indicated his desire of creating a favourable impression upon the heiress.

"All alone, Andrew?" said Lady Redwoode, as the young gentleman entered the room.

"Where is Hellice?"

"I do not know," was the response. "I saw her fitting off among the trees directly after breakfast, with a sketch-book under her arm. Mr. Kenneth says he met her down the avenue, and that she was perfectly enthusiastic in her admiration of the place and scenery. Redwoode has an earnest admirer in her."

"I am glad she is so self-reliant and disposed to make herself at home," declared the Baroness. "She was out in the park yesterday, and must be already familiar with the grounds. Cecile has not yet been beyond the gardens. I wish, Andrew, that you would show Miss Avon the waterfall and the other objects of interest in the vicinity of the house."

Mr. Forsythe expressed his delight at this commission. Cecile's hat was sent for, and she donned the coquettish combination of straw and ribbons, chattering like a bird, as Lady Redwoode fondly remarked. Then, with a kiss to the Baroness, whom she professed herself reluctant to leave even for an hour, Cecile fluttered out of the open door, followed by Mr. Andrew Forsythe, and the murmur of their voices and the sound of their laughter floated back to the room they had quitted.

"A sweet, guileless child!" mused Lady Redwoode. "How happy I shall be with her! She is all or more than I could have hoped for or dreamed of."

And then—such is the inconsistency of human nature—she sighed.

Her thoughts reverted from Cecile to Hellice, and, obeying an impulse she did not understand, she summoned a servant and ordered that when Miss Glinwick should return from her walk she should be requested to come to Lady Redwoode's boudoir. She then sank

into a reverie, leaning back upon the cushions of the divan in the recess of the bay window, and gazing with eyes that saw nothing through the Indian lattice into the garden.

Her thoughts were not all bright, and her heart was not quite content. She recalled Cecile's late conduct, and her calmer thoughts suggested the truth with regard to its cause. She was angry at herself for her suspicions, and wrung her hands silently, and then murmured—

"What a fearful legacy Horatio has left me—doubt and anxieties without end! One of those girls is true and good—but which is it? I believe I have chosen rightly, that Cecile is my own child. Her resemblance to me proves the relationship. But, after all, my theories may be wrong, and my child may be deceitful and my brother's daughter may be as truthful and pure as she looks. I have no doubt whatever that Cecile belongs to me—but the conviction does not satisfy me as it should!"

This acknowledgment, even to herself, cost her a bitter pang, and she bowed her head upon the cushion beside her, and wept unrestrainedly.

In the midst of her sorrow she became conscious of a soft arm around her neck and a soft cheek pressed to her own with tender caressing. Not a word was uttered by her consoler, but every species of tenderness and soothing known to loving hearts was employed to win her from her grief. Soft, passionate kisses were imprinted upon her hair, like a shower of snow-flakes, gentle hands stroked her tresses with lingering touch, and she was folded close against a breast whose quick throbs betrayed suppressed emotion.

Her heart swelled within her in gratitude to her child, whom she reproached herself for having misunderstood and not half appreciated.

"Cecile, my angel!" she exclaimed, putting up her arms to enfold her daughter.

"It is not Cecile, Aunt Agatha, it is only Hellice," answered a voice thrilling with sadness, yet as sweet as the minor tones of a flute.

With a look and sigh of disappointment, Lady Redwoode dropped her arms to her side.

Hellice retreated a few steps, comprehending the manner of the Baroness perfectly. There was no look of meek sorrow in her lovely face at the reception of her caresses, after she was discovered to be their author.

For a moment her dark eyes glowed angrily, then her expression softened to one of indignant grief, and she said, falteringly,—

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Agatha, but I could not help it. The servant told me when I came in that you wished to see me, and so I came in without waiting to be announced. I did not mean to kiss you, or even to touch you, for I know how you must regard my father's daughter, but you looked so sorrow-stricken that I forgot myself."

"Make no apologies, Hellice," said the Baroness, kindly. "I am not sorrowful, but my tears, I think, proceeded from the reaction of my late exaltation. Sit down and tell me where you have been."

Hellice seated herself beside her ladyship and answered,—

"I have been to the ruins at Sea View to make a sketch, Aunt Agatha."

Lady Redwoode looked surprised.

"You have been to Sir Richard Haughton's place," she said.

"Yes, Aunt Agatha. I asked Mr. Kenneth if there were any places of great interest in the neighbourhood, and, among others, he mentioned those ruins. He did not say that they belonged to Sir Richard Haughton, but he said that people frequently visited them. So I walked over there and felt well repaid by the views I obtained of sea and land. I was so entranced by them that I neglected my drawing."

"I wish you had waited until I could have accompanied you," remarked the Baroness. "Did you see Sir Richard?"

Hellice replied in the affirmative, and detailed her interview with the young Baronet, although not without a rising flush which Lady Redwoode observed.

"I will go with you when you wish to finish your sketch, Hellice," she said, gently. "Cecile, and you, and I, with Andrew and Mr. Kenneth, will visit Sea View some day soon."

"Thank you, Aunt Agatha," returned the young girl, quietly. "I was intending to finish my sketch from memory, but I shall be pleased to have the benefit of another visit to the ruins."

"I must send a note to Sir Richard immediately, informing him of my unlooked-for happiness, and requesting him to call here to-day. He is a noble young man, Hellice, and one of my cherished friends. But first I want to have a little conversation with you. Tell me, Hellice," and the Baroness fixed a keen gaze upon the girl, as though she would read her inmost heart, "why did you kiss me when you came in and found me weeping?"

"Because I felt sorry for you and loved you, Aunt Agatha," answered the girl, without hesitation.

"Why do you love me when you have not seen me except since yesterday?" questioned her ladyship. "You have not known me long enough to love me for any qualities I may possess."

"I know it, Aunt Agatha," and the sweet, dark face looked troubled. "I cannot explain it myself. From the moment that papa on his death-bed told us of his wronged sister I felt sorry for you and longed to help Cecile to console you. Of course, I did not dream that you would think me your child, but I thought perhaps you would let the daughter in some measure atone for the wrongs the father had inflicted. I would love you very much, Aunt Agatha, if you would let me."

Lady Redwoode asked herself if her niece were acting or if she were sincere. One glance at those dark, earnest eyes, glowing from depths like caverns of light, convinced her of Hellice's sincerity. A doubt as to her motive then arose to torment her.

"I do not know what to say to you, Hellice," she said, gravely. "Love with me is the growth of time. At your age, when the heart is fresh, and the sympathies warm and strong, it is easy to fix the affections upon a worthy object. But I must have time to know you before I can say that I love you."

"Yet you love Cecile already?" said Hellice, almost in a whisper.

"Because Cecile is my daughter," returned the Baroness, quickly. "I have loved her always from her birth, with an unwavering, ever-increasing love. She does not come to me a stranger, but as the child from whom I have been separated and from whom absence could not steal her mother's affection. Tell me what you think of Cecile, my dear."

"What could I say that would satisfy her mother?" asked Hellice.

"You can talk to me of her, my dear Hellice. I love to hear her name. I should delight in hearing the various little anecdotes which you must remember, and in which she has borne some part. With her sweet and gentle nature she must have performed some generous and noble deeds in her brief life. No matter how simple the circumstances, it will please me to listen to them. I want to know my daughter thoroughly, but she is too modest to relate events that would reflect credit upon her."

Hellice's lip faintly curled with scorn, which she could not entirely repress.

Lady Redwoode viewed her expression with rising displeasure, beholding in it a confirmation of the harsh allegations made against her niece by Cecile.

But the scornful smile flitted as quickly as it had come, and was succeeded by a look of unfeigned regret, for Hellice was too noble and too generous to willingly prejudice Lady Redwoode against her cousin.

"I do not remember any anecdotes at this precise moment which you would like to hear, Aunt Agatha," she said. "You can judge of her character by observation far better than by hearsay. You have seen for yourself that she has power to attract from me the affection of Renee, who is without doubt my grandmother. It has always been so. I think my parents preferred her to me."

"This is strange!" exclaimed the Baroness. "Cecile said you were preferred to her." Hellice smiled drearily, but made no attempt to refute the assertion, saying simply,—

"I have thought lately that their greater kindness to her might have been dictated by remorse at having deprived her of her mother. I have always deemed Cecile my twin sister, and have loved her as if she were such. I love her still, Aunt Agatha, and without a particle of envy at her good fortune."

It was impossible to feel a disbelief in Hellice's truthfulness.

Lady Redwoode was strangely agitated at her remarks, and exclaimed,—

"It is singular that you and Cecile should each think yourself the least loved. Perhaps this was some part of my brother's schemes to induce me to adopt his child as co-heiress with my own. Fortunately for me, he could not change Cecile's features and make her dark like his wife."

Hellice coloured, and seemed about to reply, when she checked herself abruptly, remaining silent. But sympathy with the doubting, distressed mother was expressed in every line of her lovely face, and the Baroness was not insensible of it.

"I don't know what to think!" murmured her ladyship, with pale face and anguished eyes. "If in these days inspiration were only vouchsafed to people! Yet I know I am right."

"Aunt Agatha," said Hellice, coming forward, and regarding her with tranquil eyes from which all grief had departed, "if my opinion in this matter will be of any value you can have it. I have thought long and earnestly about it, and I am convinced that a wise instinct guided your choice. Cecile looks like you, and I suppose I resemble my own mother—only," and she hesitated a second, "a little more Anglicised. Mamma was half a Hindoo, you know. I have often been told that my hair is different from that of any member of papa's family," and she touched the rippling masses that fell away from her brows with one white hand, "but it resembled hers."

"I am convinced, Hellice, thanks to your generosity, yet I can never be quite satisfied beyond all cavil, unless more light is thrown on the matter," said Lady Redwoode, sadly. "I will not detain you longer, my dear, but you have always a friend in me. Alas!" she added, under her breath, "I dare not be otherwise!"

Hellice comprehended the meaning of the words she did not hear, and took her departure with that haughty grace which distinguished her. When she had gone Lady Redwoode murmured—

"What is this mysterious power that stirs my heart when Hellice speaks? My eyes and reason assure me that Cecile is mine, but my heart cries out for Hellice when she is in my presence. What if she were my daughter? I know she is not—but yet there comes a doubt which agonises me. My brother's worldly wisdom has prevailed. I must adopt her as Cecile's sister, provided Mr. Kenneth approves of my resolve!"

She touched her bell and requested Mr. Kenneth's immediate presence.

CHAPTER IX.

When Mr. Kenneth, in compliance with her summons, made his appearance in Lady Redwoode's Oriental boudoir, he found the Baroness pale and troubled, pacing the room with uneven steps.

Her golden head had drooped upon her bosom in a mournful attitude, and her hands were clasped before her so tightly that her pink oval nails almost penetrated her delicate flesh.

She looked up at the entrance of her adviser, motioned him to a seat, and then resumed her walk, apparently forgetful of his presence.

Mr. Kenneth seated himself in some perturbation, and regarded the lady with an expression of the most affectionate anxiety.

She had always been calm, cold, and reserved in her demeanour, until within the last twenty-four hours, and he felt disturbed and even alarmed at the discovery that, underneath that icy exterior was hidden a warm, tender, and passionate nature.

He had rejoiced most unfeignedly at the advent of Lady Redwoode's daughter, and still more so at Cecile's acknowledgment as the heiress of Redwoode, for he was not an admirer of Mr. Andrew Forsythe, as has been elsewhere stated, and had little faith in his honour or good principles.

He had come to the Baroness to renew his congratulations at her great happiness, and to sympathise with her in her joy, and it is not to be wondered at that he was astonished to find her apparently neither happy nor joyful.

With a consciousness that he but faintly comprehended the intricacies of woman's nature, and least of all that of Lady Redwoode's, who carried a warm heart under an icy surface, he resigned himself to wait for the explanation which he knew would be accorded him.

He had not long to wait.

Lady Redwoode suddenly paused before him, her lavender-hued robe trailing after her gracefully; she raised her head, looking at him with mournful eyes, which resembled the blue of a lake upon which shadows are lying.

"Mr. Kenneth," she said, in a low, quick, anxious tone, "I need advice and counsel. Help me, my friend, for I am bewildered and can scarcely command my thoughts."

Was this the half-stern, calm, and haughty lady whom he had so long served with awe mingling in his friendship? Mr. Kenneth wonderingly asked himself—was this the proud, cold Baroness whom he had deemed above all weaknesses?

He felt his heart warm towards her as it had never done before. He comprehended that, grand and stately as she was, she was essentially a woman, and from that moment the rosy little man, with his unromantic face, would have cheerfully laid down his life to secure her happiness.

He arose from his chair and took her hand with the respectful freedom of one who feels himself a valued and honoured friend, and led her to the wide couch in the window recess, saying—

"Sit down, dear Lady Redwoode. You are too pale to stand. I will bring my chair and act as your oracle, if you wish," and he smiled.

He wheeled in a luxurious fauteuil, adjusted a pile of cushions under her ladyship's head, his round smooth face animated with a paternal look, and then seated himself at a little distance, awaiting her purposed communication.

Lady Redwoode was silent a moment, half reclining on her cushions, gazing abstractedly through the window into the garden, and then she said—

"I hardly know how to commence, Mr. Kenneth. I wish to talk to you about my daughter and her cousin—"

Mr. Kenneth started, and the rosy hue half deserted his cheeks.

"You don't mean, Lady Redwoode," he stammered, "that you believe yourself mistaken in your choice between the young ladies?"

"No, not that, Mr. Kenneth," returned the Baroness, hesitatingly.

"Because such an idea would be the height of insanity," said the old man, earnestly, his conviction beaming from every feature of his ruddy countenance. "It was a sublime and holy instinct that indicated to you your child, dear Lady Redwoode. Nature has stamped your lineaments upon the face of Miss Cecile. She has your golden hair, your blue eyes, your unrivalled complexion. She is tall like you, and already moves like a young queen."

Lady Redwoode smiled faintly, and, regarding her smile as a token of encouragement to proceed, the lawyer continued—

"One of these young ladies has Hindoo blood, and is the granddaughter of the old ayah. That one is Miss Hellice. Her dark complexion, her hard, changeful eyes, and the deep hue of the colour in her cheeks are all due to her Hindoo ancestry, and prove beyond all manner of doubt her parentage. Mr. Glintwick, begging your pardon, Lady Redwoode, was not half so cunning as he thought himself. He fancied he sent us a tangled skein, but at the first touch we have found a clue which unravels the whole mystery. He must have been blind not to have seen that the appearance of these young ladies would betray their identity."

"Horatio was very wily," said her ladyship, musingly.

"But he could not change nature," exclaimed Mr. Kenneth, quickly. "He hoped to confuse and bewilder your good judgment, but he has signally failed."

"Yes, he has failed!" said the Baroness, with a joyful inspiration, her fair, sweet face suddenly glowing. "I have no doubts of the justice of my choice, Mr. Kenneth—but a strange fear, a horrible misgiving came over me last night, and I have not been myself since. I was too happy to sleep, and an unpleasant fancy came over me that my bliss was nothing but a dream. I yearned to look upon my daughter's face as she lay in her innocent slumbers, and I stole to her bed-chamber. She lay on her pillow, flushed with sleep, looking like an angel, as she is. I bent over and kissed her softly, and called her sweet names, for my heart was very full. I called her my child, my daughter, and as I spoke those sweet and holy names I heard, or thought I heard, a mocking laugh almost in my ear. I started and looked around, but saw no one except the ayah, who was standing at a little distance like a marble statue, her countenance void of all expression. I demanded if she had laughed, and she answered by a stare of surprise, and by declaring that I must have deceived myself for no one had laughed. It was then that that strange fear and horrible misgiving came over me, my friend. My disordered fancy suggested that it was my brother's spirit extorting over me, and the fear came that I might after all have deceived myself. I knew better, even while I feared so, for Cecile is mine—my own—and yet, that laugh—"

"That laugh was the offspring of your disordered fancy, dear Lady Redwoode," said the old man, earnestly. "Yesterday you were in a state of supreme exaltation. I noticed that you ate scarcely anything in your joyful excitement. You were sleepless at night, and your excitement had not abated. Now, my wonder is, not that you heard a mocking laugh, but that you did not see your brother in propria persona, attended by a legion of laughing demons. Your experience was extremely moderate!" and his eyes twinkled humorously.

"Then you attach no importance to it?"

"None whatever, except to regard it as a hint to return to your regular habits of eating, drinking, and sleeping."

The Baroness looked relieved, and certainly breathed more freely.

"These things look so different when viewed with the eyes of sober common sense," she said, with a sigh of satisfaction. "You have lifted a load from my heart, my friend. And now I want you to tell me what you think of these young strangers."

"They are very beautiful, madam——"
 "Yes, I know, Mr. Kenneth, and I shall not be offended if you tell me that the beauty of Hellice far transcends that of Cecile. I know it myself—tell me what you think of my daughter."

"What can I think of her other than that she is good and beautiful as an angel?" said her ladyship's counsellor, enthusiastically. "She is gentle and loving, and looks like an innocent child, to be petted, guarded, and loved. The servants already are loud in her praise, and declare her to be your very image and counterpart."

Lady Redwoode's eyes lighted up with pleasure.

"They are right," she said. "Cecile looks like me, and in my mind she is all you have described her. She has a tender, clinging nature, rarely to be found in a grown-up maiden. Yet she has a generous soul, and would not willingly complain even to me of the wrongs and sorrows she has endured at her late uncle's hands. She said enough, however, in her heartless way to convince me that her uncle treated her very harshly at times, and that her cousin exhibited an insolent and overbearing disposition towards her. It was in a hard school, Mr. Kenneth, that my sweet Cecile developed her saint-like nature. But," she added, "I have no wish to prejudice you against Hellice. Tell me what you think of her."

Very innocently and unintentionally, but just as effectually as if she had designed it, Lady Redwoode had prejudiced her faithful friend against her orphan niece.

Mr. Kenneth had thought Hellice "a rare and radiant maiden," with a soul as pure as her glorious loveliness, and a nature as sweet and generous as an angel's. He had had a brief conversation with Hellice that morning, as has been said, and the young girl's graciousness of manner, not devoid of pride, and hauteur, had enraptured him, and caused him to wish in his own heart that nature had made her the daughter of the Baroness in Cecile's stead.

But the statement that she had been supercilious and overbearing to the wronged child of Lady Redwoode now turned the current of his feelings, and he was almost angry with himself that he should have preferred her to her fairer cousin.

Yet, even in his chagrin, he could not be less than just.

"Miss Hellice is very beautiful," he said, with a sigh, "more beautiful in form and feature than Miss Cecile. I never in my life saw such a strangely radiant loveliness. She may be gentle, but she is not meek. Once or twice already I have seen a stormy look in her eyes, and her lips have curled scornfully at some remark of her cousin's. I built up in my own mind quite a little romance about her this morning. I said to myself that she had a grand, spirited nature; a hatred of all falsehood or dissimulation; a scorn of all petty and ignoble weaknesses; and an ardent love of truthfulness, honour, and goodness. She seemed so to me. Alas, that it was all seeming!"

"You think, then, that she is not what she appears?"

"I think she is not, Lady Redwoode," said Mr. Kenneth, slowly, loth to declare in words his recent and sudden convictions. "With her Hindoo blood, she has doubtless something of the Hindoo nature. She is, perhaps, false to the core of her heart. She may be, doubtless is, wily and unscrupulous, as well as veiled in duplicity. Why she acceded so readily to your acknowledgment of Miss Cecile I do not quite understand. It seems to me she would have made an effort to take her cousin's place. Probably, however, she knew the truth and doubted her ability to set a false part. She probably comprehended that her personal appearance would betray her identity. But she must have plans, hopes, and schemes. What can they be?"

"I am sure I cannot even imagine," replied

Lady Redwoode, thoughtfully. "She visited me only a few moments before your coming, and exhibited a disposition full of tenderness and love. She seemed to yearn for affection, and I felt tempted to take her in my arms and give her a mother's caresses."

"I see her aim!" said Mr. Kenneth, abruptly. "She wishes to entwine herself around your heart and secure an equal place with Miss Cecile. I have only to say, dear madam—beware of her!"

"I don't know what to think!" exclaimed the Baroness, with a passionate quiver in her tones. "My reason urges me to act upon your advice, but there is a strange feeling at my heart which I do not understand, and which I cannot overcome, which warns me to treat her tenderly. I suppose the tie of blood between us, slight as it is, makes itself felt to me. I can explain this feeling in no other way."

"I daresay she does not deserve your consideration and pity!"

"When I summoned you here, my friend," said Lady Redwoode, "it was with the intention of consulting you with reference to making my niece co-heiress with my daughter. My mind must seem variable to you, I know. I do not understand myself."

She paused, and Mr. Kenneth seized the opportunity to combat strongly the idea of making the two young ladies co-heiresses. He declared that such a step would cruelly wrong Miss Avon, and would be a premium upon Miss Glintwick's duplicity. He said that it would be almost wicked to divide so grand a property as Redwoode or so magnificent a private fortune as that belonging to the Baroness; and he urged that the tenantry, now enthusiastic in praise of the fair-haired maiden, of whom most of them had caught glimpses, would grieve bitterly and even revolt against the fate that should place over them a mistress with Hindoo blood in her veins.

To these remarks Lady Redwoode listened thoughtfully, and, when he had concluded, she said:—

"I did not intend to divide Redwoode, Mr. Kenneth. It was my private fortune to which I referred. Redwoode must be preserved intact. I will think over what you have said, and talk with Cecile about it. She may be able to say something that will determine my resolution, but be assured that I shall do nothing rashly."

Mr. Kenneth expressed his satisfaction at this resolve, and repeated his injunction to beware of Hellice. Then a silence of brief duration occurred, the old man musing upon the singular events transpiring at Redwoode, and the lady looking idly from the window equally absorbed in thought.

Suddenly her gaze rested upon Cecile and Andrew Forsythe, who were promenading in one of the garden walks. The young girl's hands were full of flowers, and a wreath of them had been entwined about her narrow-brimmed hat. The face that looked from under the flower-laden brim was all aglow with animation and sweetness. The insipidity that marked the fair blonde features in repose had vanished utterly. Cecile was looking up with an expression of artless innocence into Mr. Forsythe's face, and he was bending down to her with an assumption of tender interest, his form looking noble and manly in contrast with her slender figure.

"A handsome young couple," murmured the Baroness, almost unconsciously.

The old man's gaze followed her own, and a look of pain crossed his face.

"I presume I understand your ladyship's meaning," he said, gravely. "But Mr. Forsythe would not be a fitting mate for a noble and lovely young girl, any more than he would be a fitting master for Redwoode."

"You are prejudiced against Andrew, my friend," said Lady Redwoode, smiling. "I have often told you that you misjudge him, since you will not give me any reason for your dislike."

"He is extravagant, and has frequently exacted sums of money from me which I have given him from my own property rather than that he should betray his folly to you. During his long visits to town he has used much more than his allowance, and I have feared that he has lost his money at the gaming table."

"You are not sure, then."

The lawyer replied in the negative.

"As to his extravagance," remarked the Baroness, "all young men have that fault in a greater or less degree. Andrew has been led to expect that he would inherit Redwoode, and that expectation may have made him more reckless of expenses. There are ways enough besides gaming to fritter away a handsome allowance, and I do not like to think ill of Andrew. Were he but married, Mr. Kenneth, he would throw aside his dissipated habits and become a staid, sober member of society. I have faith in him. I do not wish to rob him of a happy and prosperous future; and so, my friend, I will own that I shall be glad to see him the husband of my Cecile. In such an event I should feel that I was not wronging him, and that I was securing my daughter's happiness."

Mr. Kenneth checked himself in the remembrance he was about to utter, deferring his own judgment to that of the Baroness. But his happy face became clouded and his manner abstracted. Evidently, he felt already a fatherly affection for Cecile and was deeply pained at the thought of confiding her future to the care of the late Lord Redwoode's nephew.

Had he known Cecile better he would have spared himself all anxiety with regard to her, for she was supremely capable of managing her own destiny.

There was another brief conversation, and then Lady Redwoode changed her seat for one at a small inlaid writing table of Japanese or Indian origin, and proceeded to indite a friendly note to Sir Richard Haughton, informing him of the existence and restoration of her daughter, and requesting him to call as soon as convenient that he might witness her great happiness. The tiny gold pen flowed swiftly over the heavy white satin paper, tracing in delicate characters the story of her present joy, and every letter and every stroke bore evidence of her pleased excitement. The epistle finished she enclosed it in an envelope and sealed it with snow-white wax, the only variation she as yet indulged in from black.

"I will send it over to Sea View by a prompt messenger," said Mr. Kenneth, with whom the young baronet was an especial favourite, "if your ladyship will entrust it to my care."

The Baroness gave it into his keeping, and he withdrew, intent on his errand, while she returned to her sunny window nook, and gazed dreamily out of the Indian lattice that was the counterpart of one in distant India, through which she had often gazed in company with the lover of her youth. Indeed, the furniture of her room and the style of its adorning were fashioned in accordance with the luxurious tastes of her first husband, who had a passionate love for all things gorgeous and Oriental in their character, although himself a model of simplicity.

We will not attempt to analyse the lady's thoughts as she sat there. They were in a whirl of confusion from which she could not extricate them. Her reason echoed the warnings of good Mr. Kenneth, but her heart—that strange, inexplicable centre of the being—warned towards Hellice, and she could not conquer its yearnings. She said to herself that she had miscalculated her strength of resentment against her deceased brother, and that the tie of kinship between herself and his orphan daughter was stronger than she could have believed. She assured herself that her pity for Hellice was misplaced, and yet she could not withdraw it.

"Granting that she is false and deceitful," she mused, "granting that she is only my niece, the daughter of my brother and his half-

Indian wife, there yet comes through my mind the last word of Horatio: 'Beware, in choosing one, of wronging the other!' I know I have chosen rightly, and yet—and yet—

If, as some enthusiasts believe quite possible, the soul of Horatio Glintrick could have looked in upon his lovely widowed sister at that moment, and there remained in the immortal and freed spirit, how would he have exulted in the success of his last scheme, the latest machination which he had conceived and put into execution.

For, though morally convinced that Cecile was her own child, poor Lady Redwoode felt at times a want of confidence in her own judgment, and a horrible fear that she might have deceived herself in her choice. She had no doubt that Hellice was all that Cecile had declared her to be. She had no doubt but that Hellice was Renee's grand-daughter, and, as she had said, there was scarcely room for uncertainty; but yet—

A restless look appeared in her deep, azure eyes, and the rose blooms on her pale cheeks deepened, and she moved nervously as if to escape from her thoughts. She put away from her white forehead the heavy tresses of pale gold, and then clasped her hands tightly, and gave herself up to painful musings.

In the midst of her reverie she was interrupted by the return of Cecile, who came in gaily through the glazed door, alone, the incarnation of brightness and sunshine.

At sight of her a load seemed lifted from Lady Redwoode's heart. Her doubts were all dispelled, her fears overcame, and her soul became serenely tranquil.

"Come to me, love," she said, in a voice freighted with tenderness, holding out her hand. "I have missed you and have been feeling dull. I feel I shall become sadly dependent upon you, my daughter, for your presence frightens away all my misgivings."

Cecile gave a quick glance at the Baroness from under her yellow lashes, and hastened to her side with child-like impulsiveness.

"Misgivings, mamma!" she exclaimed. "Are you tired of me already? Do you prefer Hellice? Have you seen my cousin since I have been out?"

"Yes, love; I have seen Hellice since her return from her walk. She showed a very sweet side of her character, or a sweet seeming, but she has not altered my convictions in the least. I know you are mine, my love. Now tell me if you are pleased with Andrew."

"Very much, dear mamma. He is handsome and intelligent, and pays me so many compliments that I can't help liking him," replied Cecile, with an affectation of artless innocence.

Lady Redwoode smiled and softly stroked the maiden's hair.

"I am glad you are pleased with him, my angel," she said, tenderly. "I think I could resign you to Andrew's care, all things considered, easier than to any other, unless that other were—"

"Whom, mamma?" asked Cecile, as the widow hesitated.

"A neighbour of mine, Sir Richard Haughton. But I ought not to have mentioned his name, for he is believed to be invulnerable to ladies' charms. And if he were not, I should still prefer Andrew, for I feel as though Andrew had a sort of claim upon Redwoode."

"This Sir Richard Haughton, mamma—is he young?"

"Yes, love, young and handsome, although his face is thought too grave and stern for one of his years. He will call here to-day, and you can decide for yourself upon his attractiveness. But remember that Andrew is to be your hero," and her ladyship smiled gravely. "By-the-way, darling, you told me that you love your cousin, Hellice!"

"So I do, mamma," she replied wonderingly.

"I wish to talk with you about her. You

know I acknowledged you yesterday as the heiress of Redwoode!"

Cecile replied in the affirmative.

"You also know, perhaps, that I inherited from my mother a handsome fortune. It is in relation to that fortune that I wish to speak. You must not think, my own child, that I doubt the holy and intimate relationship between you and me. I fear that you may deem me weak, but my brother's last words—the last of his letter—haunt me cruelly. I know that Hellice is only my niece, but, whatever her character, she is akin to you and to me, and I will provide for her. I have decided to declare Hellice my intended successor to my mother's fortune."

Cecile drooped her head and a bitter expression of disappointed avarice flitted over her face. Her eyes glittered strangely with an angry look, but when she lifted her countenance—a moment later to Lady Redwoode's searching gaze she was calm and self-possessed, and even apparently pleased.

"How generous you are, my darling mother!" she exclaimed with seeming admiration and enthusiasm. "You have anticipated what I would have asked had I possessed sufficient courage. I have forgiven Hellice all her cruelty to me, and I should like to testify my good feeling towards her by some sacrifice in her favour. Perhaps Hellice will love me now for your sake!"

She bestowed a kiss upon the widow's cheek, and then resumed her seat and her enthusiastic comments upon Lady Redwoode's intended generosity.

The effects of her remarks, as she expected, was to shake the Baroness's new-formed resolution, but the latter did not permit her indecision to become apparent. She listened quietly to Cecile, her convictions of Hellice's unworthiness increasing with every word, and her love and confidence in the former strengthening in a corresponding ratio.

"I suppose I ought to make my will," she said, wearily, after a long period of abstraction. "But there is time enough," she added, with an attempt at gaiety. "I do not like to think of gloomy things during the first days and weeks of your coming home."

"You look tired, mamma," said Cecile, with tender sympathy. "I am distressing you with my reminiscences of Indian life under my task-mistress Hellice. Lie down and try to sleep, while I run upstairs for a siesta. I miss my morning after-breakfast sleep more than you can guess."

She made a luxurious couch of the pillows on the divan, let fall the curtains that made the window nook an enclosed recess, and softly stole away, closing the door noiselessly behind her in her retreat.

It was singular that when left alone Lady Redwoode's thoughts reverted to that soft shower of kisses which Hellice had that morning rained upon her bowed head rather than to the carresses of which Cecile was so liberal.

It was singular that the dark and delicate loveliness of Hellice was prominent in her mind above the fairer beauty of the maiden she claimed as her daughter, and that the sweet, ringing, flute-like tones of the former seemed to drown completely the memory of the weaker, less soulful voice of the latter.

Yet such was the truth, and the widowed Baroness hated herself for it.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No 2013. Back numbers can be obtained through any News-agent.)

WEDDING EPOCHS.—The first anniversary of a wedding is the iron wedding; the fifth, wooden; the tenth, tin; the fifteenth, crystal; the twentieth, china; the twenty-fifth, silver; the thirtieth, cotton; the thirty-fifth, linen; the fortieth, woollen; the forty-fifth, silk; the fiftieth, golden; and the seventy-fifth, diamond.

Get Acquainted With Yourself

In these days of making haste to live a dozen lives in one little span of three-score years and ten there seems to be danger that you will find no time in which to become acquainted with yourself.

You do not have time to sit down quietly by yourself and get acquainted with that part of your make-up with which the world is not familiar.

Every individual has a secret self which he does not show to his friends. Even his nearest and dearest know very little about it. There are depths in the nature of those with whom we associate that we can never fathom, whether they be for good or whether they be for evil.

You find time to go to lectures, and exhibitions, and receptions, and all the numerous society events which one who is in the swim must frequent if she would keep in the current, and be anybody. You go out to drive, and to give your coachman, if you have one, opportunity to show his proud disdain of all those who have not the happy distinction of a long-tailed green coat with brass buttons, and a tall hat with a cockade; and you bow graciously to those whom it is for your interest to recognise, and look the other way when you meet those who are not in your set. You go to church on Sundays, when you do not have a headache, and take stock of the hats and new suits in front of you, and wish so ardently that you had eyes in the back of your head, so that you could observe the toilettes of the ladies behind you.

You listen politely but drowsily to the minister as he tries to acceptably tell to his parishioners a few minor points in the plan of salvation, as he understands it.

Yes; you find time for all these duties; but how much time do you devote to getting acquainted with yourself?

Are you making the most of that life which has been given you to form the character which is to go with you into eternity, and which is to follow you when flesh shall have been dissolved, and the places which now know you shall know you no more for ever?

Do you know if you have lived up to your best privileges? If you have lifted yourself up to that high plane of existence where you will have nothing to regret in the way of neglected opportunities and remorseful "might have beens"?

Have you fathomed your capacity for right living? Have you measured the height and depth of your capabilities? Do you know your weak points, and have you built up about them a wall of self-defence which will hold when temptation comes? Do you know in what way you could be tempted? Are you sure that beneath the right temptation you would not yield?

Do you realise that every moment of your life you are mounting higher or sinking lower? You cannot stand still. Is your way upward or downward?

Oh, no; we are not preaching. Only asking a few simple questions which every one who is well acquainted with himself ought to be able to answer.

Stop, and get acquainted with yourself. Think out your life. Fathom your capabilities. Understand what you can do, and what you are doing. Measure your strength, and be sure as to what you can carry through before you undertake it. The man who thoroughly knows himself is a long way on the road to a liberal education.

And when you have become acquainted with yourself, do not lose your hold on that acquaintanceship. Cultivate it, hold fast to it, and do not grudge it a daily hour of companionship, for you need it more than you need the acquaintance of anything else in this world.

ON CHRISTMAS EVE

NOVELETTE.

(Continued from page 275.)

Sir Geoffrey himself had gone home. He had done all that man could do to trace the poor little ne'er-do-well. There were duties connected with his estate that could not well be left neglected any longer.

It was a hard home-coming for him. Everything about Dean Court reminded him of Dolores. For Christmas time at the Court was full of associations with her. As a child she had always spent the holidays with May. Then last year, when the Deans returned after their long absence, her face had been the brightest and fairest of all the girl-visitors Lady Dean had gathered round her.

Regularly once a month letters came from Lord Carlyon. He seemed to be roaming restlessly about, with no settled plan of travel; but he wrote very fondly of his baby-daughter, and promised to spend Christmas in England if the Deans would meet him in Park Lane.

He reached Victoria quite early in the day, sent his servant and the luggage home, then turned into his club—a nameless reluctance to face the house he had beautified for May now she was gone making him put off his meeting with her relations till the last moment.

Besides, he had another errand. He wanted to see May's grave. He had never been in Brompton Cemetery since the day when he left there all that remained of his child-wife.

Christmas Eve! He and May had passed three Christmases together, though never one as man and wife. It was but natural he should think of the last of the three Christmas Eves, of the day when he met Dolores in the grounds gathering the clusters of bright red holly berries—Dolores, in the pride of youth and gaiety, warning him off as a trespasser.

He reached Brompton about four. The short winter's day had not closed in when he stood beside May's grave. He had refused for any stone to cover it. It seemed to him unnatural. He loved better to think of her as sleeping beneath the grass and daisies, so only a cross of pure marble marked her resting-place. He himself had chosen the inscription:—

In ever-loving memory of
MAY,
the cherished wife of Reginald,
Twelfth Baron Carlyon.
Aged 18.

That was all. Only eighteen, and yet both wife and mother! Still, as he stood there, much as he grieved for the child-friend who had been his little comforter in bygone sorrows, Rex had no bitterness of regret.

"Dear little May!" half breathed the husband, "she loved me, and she is happy!"

He stood behind the cross, hidden by it from view, so that a slight figure kneeling at the foot of the grave had not seen him approach. As he noticed his fellow-mourner she rose slowly, and laid on the grassy mound a wreath of holly berries. She was pale and sad; her dress poor and worn; her beautiful hair almost hidden beneath a plain straw hat. But the eyes had their old wisdom, the face its old charm. Besides, in any place, Rex Carlyon would have known Dolores.

"Dolly!"

She started. Then she said simply, "I could not help coming. We were so often together on Christmas Eve. I thought you were abroad. And May loved me!"

"She died loving you," said Rex, gently. "Do you know, she seemed certain we should meet again one day, and she gave me a message for you?"

"What was it?"

"When you see Dolly," quoted Rex, "tell her I have been so happy."

Dolores' eyes filled with tears. Rex went on,—

"She was happy always. She had the

sweetest, brightest nature Heaven ever made; but, Dolly, she never guessed your sacrifice. Her heart would have broken if she had known at what a cost you purchased her happiness."

Dolores looked amazed.

"How could you guess?"

"I have known the truth now a long time, ever since May had your wedding present, and told me of the last talk you ever had together. Dolores, I loved you always, even when I thought you faithless; but May's words told me my love had not been deceived, that you were what I had thought you, true and noble!"

"I couldn't help it," said Dolly, gravely. "I think it would have killed me to see May suffer. I was used to sorrow, and she was such a bright sunbeam of a creature."

"Do you know that Geoffrey Dean has sought you for months past?—that his mother has repented of her once harsh judgment, and will receive you with all her old love?"

Dolores shook her head.

"It cannot be! The past is past. I could never go back to the old, happy times—never, never more!"

"Why not?"

"Because for nearly two years I have lived in poverty. Do you think Lady Dean would care to welcome a girl who has acted at one of the humblest theatres in London for more than eighteen months?"

"Why not?"

"Because it would be unheard of."

"Where do you act?" said Rex, gravely.

"I shall come and see you to-night!" She shook her head.

"I am not acting now. I shall not be at work for more than two months because of the Christmas pantomime."

"Dolores," said Reginald, gravely, "I know why you sent me that letter. I honour your motive in sending it; but Dolores, that motive no longer exists. No sacrifice of yours can avail May now. And my life is lonely, darling! I want my love!"

"And you can love me still?"

"I have never left off loving you. Dolly, in a few months you must be my wife. Till then, won't you let Lady Dean take care of you for me?"

"She would think you demented!"

"I fancy not. Geoffrey knows all my secrets. Lady Dean told me, in her last letter, in my position I was bound to marry again very soon. Dolores, I shall never take her advice unless you redeem your promise!"

"But—"

He interrupted her.

"On her deathbed, May wished 'I had not disliked you so.' Poor child, my true feeling for you was the only secret I ever kept from her. Dolly, do you know why she so much regretted my supposed dislike?"

"No."

"Because she would fain have left the two she cared for most to your keeping. When we put the child into her arms, she said, regretfully, 'Dolly would have loved her so!'"

"The child!"

"Another May, the likeness, they tell me, of her mother. Dolores, surely we have suffered enough. My darling, don't let your pride separate us any longer. I want you to be my wife, and little May's mother!"

"It would be your ruin. All your friends would turn from you in horror!"

"No friend I valued. Dolores, suppose I yield the point for now. Will you make me a solemn promise? Give me your address, and promise not to change it without telling me."

Dolores sat, a few hours later, in her humble room, stitching busily away. She could not afford to be idle, and plain needlework was her only resource while not required by her late manager. The long hours did not get on swiftly. Dolly's head ached. That meeting with Rex had brought the past so vividly back to her, and her happiness seemed so near,

it was cruel that she might not put out her hand and clasp it.

"Dolores!"

She looked up. Sir Geoffrey Dean stood watching her, with his kind, generous face.

"Once, long ago, dear," he said, simply, "I came to fetch you to us for Christmas. That visit brought you bitter sorrow, but yet I am here again on the same errand. My mother sends you her dear love, and begs you, for May's sake, to come and spend your Christmas with us!"

"But—"

"We know all, dear!" he said, gently. "Rex has told us. Mother loves you just as she did in your childhood, and more, for all you suffered for our darling. She says, Dolly, you are the only woman she could bear to see in her daughter's place. Come to us, and you shall be to her as her own child, until the day you become Reginald's wife!"

And when the June roses bloomed the poor little ne'er-do-well became a peeress. All England knew Lord Carlyon married Dean Linley's grandchild, and that for a short time she had been on the stage; yet no one ever reproached him for his second marriage, nor regarded it as a *misalliance*. His wife was one of the most charming women in London, the world said, and exactly suited to him.

The Fances never knew the honours that came to this girl they discarded, but Missford thoroughly changed its opinion regarding Dolores when it discovered her in Lady Carlyon, and everyone declared that they at least had always liked her.

Lady Carlyon cared very little for her popularity. The friends she most prized were the Grays and Sir Geoffrey and his mother.

Prosperity has dawned for her now. Her sky is serene and clear. She has the love of her husband, the caresses of her little children to make life sweet to her; yet she will never quite forget it was Geoffrey's voice which called her back to happiness—Geoffrey, who brought her home, and placed her hand in Reginald's on Christmas Eve.

[THE END.]

HEROES AND HEROES.

We give unstinted praise to the man

Who is brave enough to die;

But the man who struggles unflinchingly

Against the currents of destiny

And bears the storm of adversity,

We pass unnoticed by.

We've plaudits and tears for him who falls,

Borne down in the shock of strife;

But a word of cheer we neglect to say

To him who plods on his dreary way

And fights in silence from day to day

The unseen battles of life.

There's courage, I grant, required to face

Grim death on the gory field.

There's also courage required to meet

Life's burden and sorrow; to brave defeat;

To strive with evil and not retreat;

To suffer and not to yield.

Some moments are there in every life

When the spirit longs for rest;

When the heart is filled with a bleak despair

When the weight of trouble, remorse, and care

Seems really greater than we can bear,

And death were a welcome guest.

But we crush it down and we go our way

To the duties that lie in wait.

From day to day we renew the fight,

To climb at last to the uncrowned height,

And to climb o'er time and fate.

And thus—for my heart goes out to them—

My meed of praise I would give

To those who struggle life's path along,

The host of toil, who are patient, strong,

The unrewarded, unnumbered throng

Who are brave enough to live.

Society

Not many people know, perhaps, that Queen Alexandra once probably prevented a railway accident. As Princess of Wales one of her favourite recreations was photography, and a photograph she took of the bridge near Wollerton station revealed an unsuspected curve in the bridge when a train was passing over it. The Princess, not certain whether the curve was due to a defective film, took another photograph, with the result that the bridge was examined and declared to be unsafe.

Nobody needs to be told that the Queen of England is among the friendliest and homeliest ladies in the land. Sitting with a cottager on the Sandringham estate, in her Princess days, she took up a stocking to while away the time. "I rather pride myself on the way I can knit stockings," the Princess remarked; "I have just made a pair for the Prince, and—" The Princess was rudely broken off by the old lady's startled exclamation: "So the Prince wears stockings, do 'e? Well, well. Ah, your Royal Highness! only me and you, who makes these stockings, knows the 'orrible 'oles the men do make in the 'eels!"

H.R.H. the Prince of Wales it is who will be the exceptional feature in the coming Coronation procession. And this he will be simply by taking part in it. In the nature of things the occasions when a Prince of Wales has assisted at his father's Coronation have been rare. The first George had an Heir Apparent, and the second George, when it came to his turn to be crowned, was the father of "Fred." But the presence of an actually crowned Prince of Wales at a Coronation function has to be looked back for. The interesting editorial question of a Prince of Wales's Coronation mantle thus arises.

The Duke of Connaught is not alone in his desire to see active service. His son, Prince Arthur, is bitterly disappointed at not being allowed to go out just yet to South Africa. Boy-like, he is eager to see what is going on, although he realises that he has a good deal more to learn in his profession, while his family are of the opinion that he is over-young to face the hardships which would await him at the front.

A great hobby with Princess Margaret of Connaught and her sister is the collecting of stones and uncut gems. These are arranged with great care, and comprise some most interesting and rare specimens. It is customary with their relations to make the Princesses a present of some addition to this collection at birthday and other festive times, and just recently they have had a number of new specimens, as the Princess of Wales has brought home to her cousins a number of stones picked up by herself at different times during her wonderful journey.

A carefully-arranged catalogue is being prepared of the presents, curiosities, and photographs brought home by the Prince and Princess of Wales from their tour in the Ophir. When ready the collection will, it is stated, be placed on exhibition in the East as well as the West-end of London, and probably also in some of the principal provincial cities. The list of presents is long and varied, beginning with a Spanish lace mantilla presented to the Princess at Gibraltar, and ending with a belated perambulator which an enterprising Ontario manufacturer designed during the Royal visit to Canada with the trademark name of "The Prince of Wales," and forwarded to England direct.

The Duke of Roxburghe will carry the Lord High Steward's staff at the Coronation. He will represent an extremely ancient office—one that existed before the time of the Conqueror, and that was once hereditary in the House of De Montfort.

Statistics

THE membership of co-operative societies has quadrupled during the past twenty-five years, and now includes 1,681,000 persons, or over 4 per cent. of the population of the Kingdom, including Ireland.

A GERMAN statistician has been collecting facts dealing with the relation that suicide bears to divorce. In Prussia, it seems, out of 1,000,000 persons 348 women committed suicide after being divorced, as compared with only sixty-one married women, while the men were in the proportion of ten divorced to one married suicide. It would appear that many of those who do not commit suicide go mad. In Wurttemberg there are in the asylums 3,024 divorced persons, against 283 married, 416 celibates, and 676 widows and widowers.

Christmas in the Southern Seas

Although it is forty years since we last spent a Christmas in the old country (says a writer in the current "Empire Review"), we shall never forget those family gatherings, as father, mother, and children united in the old home. At this southern end of the world, where Christmas is midsummer, and where even the traditional Christmas dinner must perforce be laid in the house, it must be with every door and window open, and when a cold breeze to temper the heat is most welcome. Is it really Christmas? The almanac declares the fact, yet the thermometer records 90 degrees in the shade, and on the dinner table the viands, generally, the salads, ices, and piled-up dishes of strawberries, with unlimited cream, suggest that things are somehow reversed since the days of long ago.

True, we deck our churches and homes, as in the old land, with evergreens, but the choicest summer flowers are the chosen decorations. And as the day wanes we do not close the curtains and gather round the fire, but as the air cools down, tennis and outdoor games claim the young people.

Christmas-tide on a sheep run is one of the merriest, and yet one of the saddest, times in the year to the average station hand. Merriest because Christmas Day and Boxing Day are his only recognised holidays through the year, and most of the neighbouring families are rejoicing over home gatherings. Saddest, because he is probably too far away from home to join the family, and at such a time his loneliness brings a keener pang than at other seasons. Christmas Day itself passes off very quietly, the distinguishing feature being the midday meal, for which, perhaps, a turkey, some fowls, or a joint of roast beef appear. On a station the constant serving of mutton becomes monotonous, so that a cut of roast beef is a great treat. Of course, a good big plum pudding is served, but somehow the dish hardly seems appetising on a hot day. Then comes the inevitable smoke and rest under the sheltering tree. The evening passes quietly in such company as may be available. Boxing Day is the great day for sports. It is the principal gathering of the year, and attended by everyone, male and female, including Maoris of both sexes, attired in the brightest colours they can procure. Indeed, the natives are frequently the most successful competitors in these feats of skill and strength. At night all meet in the station wool shed, which, cleaned up, hung with sheets, and decorated with flags and ferns, makes a very good social hall. Warm as it is, there is plenty of dancing, varied with songs and recitations. Supper is handed round, and the fun is kept up fast and furious till near daybreak, when in the growing sunshine all scatter homewards, and the Christmas festivities are over for that year.

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Fancy Jars, 1/- each, with full directions, Post free in U.K. for value.

F. C. CALVERT & CO., Manchester.

Gleanings

It is easy for the light-headed to be light-hearted.

He who confesses that he lies, lies; he who denies that he lies, lies twice.

We admire the man who will listen to reason because he gives us a chance to talk.

Most of us know only one man whom we regard as absolutely fair and unbiassed, and modesty prevents us from naming him.

STAND UP WHEN FITTING SHOES.—"People would find less difficulty with ready-made shoes," says an experienced salesman, "if they would stand up to fit them on, instead of sitting down. Nine persons out of ten, particularly ladies, want a comfortable chair while they are fitting a shoe, and it is with the greatest difficulty you can get them to stand for a few minutes, even after the shoe is fitted. Then, when they begin walking about, they wonder why the shoes are not so comfortable as they were at first trial. A woman's foot is considerably smaller when she sits in a chair than when she walks about. Exercise brings a larger quantity of blood into the feet, and they swell appreciably. The muscles also require certain space. In buying shoes this fact should be borne in mind."

THE CIGARETTE.—Probably few smokers of Egyptian cigarettes trouble themselves greatly where the tobacco they enjoy comes from, and if asked would answer "Egypt, of course." As a matter of fact, however, practically no tobacco is grown in Egypt, as the soil is too sandy; almost all of it comes from Turkey, though the manufacture of the best qualities of leaf tobacco into cigarettes, both for foreign and for Turkish consumption, is carried on almost exclusively in Egypt, and the paper is made in the same country. Of late years the consumption of Turkish cigarettes has increased enormously. The cheaper grades are usually mixed with tobacco grown in the country of consumption; a better grade is made exclusively from one variety of Turkish leaf, but the best grades contain as many as nineteen different kinds of the finest selected Turkish tobaccos.

VENEZUELA PEARLS.—The island of Margarita, off the coast of Venezuela, is one of the most celebrated centres of pearl fishery. The Spaniards in the days of Columbus found the natives of Margarita and the neighbouring mainland decked out with pearls, and the pearl-producing oysters of that locality have never since failed in their productivity. Recently the price of pearls has risen in the market, and the activity of the Venezuelan fishermen has correspondingly increased. Metal scoops are dragged over the oyster beds, and the interest of the search culminates when the shells thus secured are opened. A black pearl is a rarity commanding a high price. Fine white pearls, if of good lustre, are also very valuable. A French company has recently obtained a concession from the Venezuelan Government to fish for pearls with diving apparatus.

ONE of the most interesting objects connected with old Stepney Parish Church which did not perish in the flames that so recently attacked that historic building is the "Fish and Ring" monument to Dame Rebecca Berry. Nobody can visit the old church without learning something of the quaint legend associated with it, which reminds one of a similar incident in the Arabian Nights. The monument has given rise to a tradition that Lady Berry was the heroine of a popular ballad, which describes her as a farmer's daughter doomed by fate to wed a knight. The knight threw a ring into the sea, and commanded the love-sick maid never to see his face again on pain of instant death unless she could produce that ring. Some time afterwards, while acting as cook for a family of high degree, she finds the ring in a fish she is dressing for dinner. After that, of course, she marries her knight without further parley.

THE COLLECTION WILL NOW BE TAKEN.—A good story is told of a certain clergyman who had for his curate a tall, cadaverous-looking individual. One Sunday, according to custom, the vicar made an appeal for the curate's stipend fund, but, unfortunately, glanced over at his co-worker as he concluded with these words: "The collection will now be taken for that object."

THE HORSESHOE CURVE DOOMED.—One of the most interesting of the curiosities of American railways is the so-called Horseshoe Curve on the Pennsylvania line through the Alleghenies. It has long been conspicuous even in London in the pictures exposed in the windows of the offices of American companies. It is now reported that the curve is to be abandoned, and that there is to be substituted for it a seven-mile tunnel, which will only be surpassed in length by the famous hole through the St. Gothard. The result of the change will be the shortening of the journey by three minutes.

MUCH IN LITTLE.—A most interesting historical object is a simple shaft of granite which rises from the roadside near the town of Wilna, on the western boundary of Russia. It bears two inscriptions in the Russian language. On that side of the shaft which faces the west are these words:—

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE
PASSED THIS WAY IN 1812
WITH 410,000 MEN.

On the other side, facing east:—

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE
PASSED THIS WAY IN 1812
WITH 9,000 MEN.

The history of the most disastrous military campaign ever undertaken is told in those two sentences.

THE COLONATION CLUBS, formed for the purpose of providing people with clothes for the forthcoming ceremony, can have the satisfaction of knowing that they would not have been allowed to exist in Elizabeth's reign. The "virgin" Queen's love of pageants and fine clothes proved so infectious that laws had to be made to control the dress of the citizens. Merchants' wives were forbidden to wear "monstrous hats in garish colours, which are winked at and borne within the Court," and had to content themselves instead with knitted white woollen caps. Apparently, too, the modish woman already sent to Paris for her gowns, for another regulation of the same period forbade any but the nobility to wear woollen stuffs that were manufactured on the Continent.

THE BARBER'S POLE.—The sign of the barber's pole is a mystery to most people, but it seems that in olden times the profession of a surgeon was practised in common with the art of a barber, and the one who practised thus was designated a barber-surgeon. A company under this title was founded as early as 1308, and the London Company was incorporated in 1461, in the first year of Edward IV. This professional union was dissolved in the reign of Henry VIII., 1540, when it was declared that "No person using any shaving or barbery in London shall occupy any surgery, letting of blood, or other matter, except only drawing of teeth." These barber-surgeons exhibited over their doors a pole, which was variously coloured with running bands of red and white, or in some cases red, white and blue. The red and white bands would, no doubt, represent the white bandages stained with the blood of the patient, whilst it has been suggested that those bearing three colours indicate the veins, arteries, and nerves, blue, red, and white being used respectively for this purpose, as is the case with modern text-books in anatomy. In Austria the sign is a golden plate hung above the shop, in which one may perhaps discover the bleeding-bowl used in letting blood, an operation so commonly performed on our ancestors, with very excellent results. The surgeons received their charters from the hands of Henry VIII. himself in 1540, and this forms the subject of a fine picture by Holbein.

A Very Good Reason.

"How do you feel, Maude, this morning?" asked a pretty girl of a friend, on the morning following a Christmas party.

"Perfectly wretched!" came the reply as a curly head was raised from the pillow. "Got a splitting headache, feel quite washed out, and guess I look it. How do you feel? You look as bright and lively as if dances and Christmas confectionery were unknown."

"In fine form," was the response, "But I took a couple of Bile Beans before turning in. That's the reason."

For the headache, weariness, depression, dry mouth, indigestion, and sleeplessness, resulting from Christmas eating, Bile Beans are an unfailing remedy. They gently relax the bowels and relieve the system of the congested condition which occasions headache, dizziness, and that feeling of dulness, while they also tone up and stimulate the digestive organs which have been temporarily deranged by the overwork which Christmas dishes freely partaken of have thrown upon them.

If you would like to try Bile Beans without incurring any expense, cut out this par, write across it the name of this paper, and send it with your full name and address and a penny stamp to pay return postage, to the Bile Bean Co's. Central Distributing Depot, Greek Street, Leeds, Yorks. Your wants will then be promptly satisfied.

Facetiae

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.—Madge: He says I am a hot-house flower. Marjorie: Is that why he keeps you so long in the conservatory?

AT THE ZOO.—The Monk: Five baby elks have been born here within the last four weeks. The Cockatoo: By George! we'll organise a lodge.

"I REGARD the use of beer as the true temperance principle. When I work all day and am exhausted, nothing helps me like a glass of beer. It assists nature, you understand," said Remson to Benson. "It makes a fool of me," Benson replied. "Just so!" exclaimed Remson. "That's what I say—it assists nature!"

COLONEL YERGEN had the bad luck to drop a valuable lamp, shattering it into a thousand pieces. "Dear me, how unfortunate!" exclaimed Mrs. Yerger. "How unfortunate! How lucky I let it drop, for if you had done it I'd have raised the mischief of a row. You are in big luck that it was I who dropped that lamp, Maria."

ONE of last season's belles, who, after the bridal trip, began housekeeping in her native city, was asked by one of her servants what she should order for dinner for herself and her husband. She had had no experience in any domestic arrangements, but answered with the utmost assurance: "Oh, get a pound of steak, and save the rest for breakfast!"

A GERMAN has invented a safe that, on its lock being tampered with, throws open its doors, seizes and drags and locks in the burglar, and handcuffs and holds him in readiness to be conducted to the police-court in the morning. This is almost equal to the servant-girl patent bed, which at a certain hour in the morning pitches her out, dresses her, carries her downstairs, and shows her how to start the fire.

In a small town an ex-judge is cashier of the bank. "The cheque is all right, sir," he said to stranger; "but the evidence you offer in identifying yourself as the person to whose order it is drawn is scarcely sufficient." "I've known you to hang a man on less evidence, Judge," was the stranger's response. "Quite likely," replied the ex-judge; "but when it comes to letting go of cold cash we have to be careful."

Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

Owing to the Christmas holidays, next week's issue of the

LONDON READER

will be published on Monday, instead of Tuesday.

JOHN B.—Wind is chiefly caused by the heat of the sun, which rarefies the atmosphere most exposed to its rays. The air, when rarefied, becomes lighter, and ascends to higher regions, while the surrounding air, being heavier, rushes in to supply its place. The trade winds are so called because of the advantages derived by navigators from their steadiness and permanency. They extend nearly thirty degrees on each side of the equator, and blow always in the same direction. At the equator the earth's rotary motion is necessarily greatest, and the temperature highest. To supply the place of the air which is constantly ascending in the Torrid Zone, in consequence of its rarefaction, continued currents from the more temperate regions move toward the equator; but coming from regions where the earth's rotary motion is slower to those where it is quicker, before they can acquire the increased velocity, they are left behind, and thus, not moving eastward with the earth, appear to move westward.

L. BEECH.—The "Battle of the Spurs" took place in Guinegate, France, in 1513, between the forces of Henry VIII. and those of the Duke de Longueville, and was so called because in that contest the French used their spurs in flight rather than their swords in opposing their enemies. In executing a movement intended to deceive the English, the French cavalry caused a panic through the army, and all the French ran away without striking a blow. No one was killed, and only one man was hurt; and it is said he broke his nose by falling down while running.

EMMA.—It is evident that the young man is too disputatious, and that his opinions on most subjects are entirely dissimilar to yours. When such unpleasant arguments arise during courtship it is likely that they would become unbearable after marriage. You are both devoid of tact, or you would shun the topics that cause such bitter dissension. My opinion is that you would not prove suitable mates, and that it would be best to gradually end the intimacy which has made the young man a regular visitor at your home. People who are influenced by true love have little trouble in steering clear of themes that engender angry controversy.

KATE.—The dance known as the polka originated in Bohemia about the year 1830. At first it was very lively, with considerable stamping and kicking; but in France it was modified, and made more graceful. From Bohemia it spread to various parts of Europe, and soon became very popular. In 1835 it was danced at the Court in Prague; in 1839 in Vienna; in 1840 in Paris; in 1844 in London. The name is a corruption of "polka," meaning half, on account of its short half-steps. In England it became a perfect craze; fabrics, hats, and streets were named after it, and even public-houses displayed on their signs the "Polka Arms."

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OUR XMAS PRESENTS

We do not care to spend a lot of money over advertising the "LONDON READER" in the newspapers. We would far rather give the money to our readers, because we are certain that they will advertise us much better than the papers would. We have been giving away all sorts of presents month after month, and we are now going to eclipse all our former efforts.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO

If you want to receive one of these lovely Gold Pattern **SOVEREIGN PURSES**, Fashionable Gold Design **NECKLETS**, Massive Gold Pattern **CURB BRACELETS**, or Plated **SALT CELLARS**, with gilt lining, we will tell you what you have to do. There is no Puzzle to be solved, but

the only condition is that you send us Sixpence for which ever of these lovely pieces of jewellery you like, together with a penny for postage, and if the goods are not sold out we will send to you, but if they are all gone we will

return your money.

WRITE AT ONCE

We have only a limited quantity of the goods, and we cannot get more, so that if you want one of them write instantly. In any case, the offer will close on December 31st; but we expect to be sold out within a very few days after this announcement appears.

PUZZLE EDITOR,
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KENNETH.—(1) The father can give both brides away at a double wedding. Of course the brother could give the younger sister away, if preferred; but I think it is nicer for the father to perform this office. He would take one daughter on each arm up the aisle, and stand between them during the ceremony, each bride being on the respective bridegroom's left hand. (2) Yes, each bridegroom should have a "best man" all to himself, but one person can fill the office for both if preferred. (3) As regards the invitation to the ceremony and "at home," it should be on the same lines exactly as to a single wedding, but with four names added instead of two.

LILY.—The Apollo Belvidere is a renowned statue of antiquity, which has generally been considered as embodying the highest ideal of manly beauty. This great work of art was discovered in 1503, amid the ruins of ancient Antium, and purchased by Pope Julius II., who placed it in the Belvidere gallery of the Vatican. The name of the artist is a matter of conjecture, but it is supposed to be the work of Calamis, a Greek sculptor of the fifth century before the Christian era. The figure is nearly seven feet in height, nude, but a cloak, fastened round the neck, hangs gracefully over the right arm. The expression of the face is calm and godlike triumph, mixed with refined disdain.

L. HAWKINS.—The greatest glove-making country in the world is Germany, and not France, as is the general belief. In Germany there are 1,100 establishments devoted to the manufacture of leather gloves. About 1,000 of these are engaged exclusively in the production of kid gloves. There are, besides, 100 tanneries for kid and 40 tanneries for shoe-making leather. There are 85 glove concerns that work exclusively for export. Of the other countries, Austria-Hungary has 350, France 225, England 190, Italy 100, and Sweden, Norway, and Spain between 50 and 60 glove manufacturing firms each. Russia has only about 30. There is in Germany no important glove-making centre, the industry being scattered. In Austria the glove-making centres are Prague and Vienna; in France, Paris, Grenoble, and Chaumont; in England, London and Worcester; in Italy, Naples, Milan, and Turin; in Sweden, Stockholm and Malmö; and in Belgium the chief glove-making centre is Brussels.

AMY.—The glass stopper of a bottle may be loosened by dropping a little glycerine or sweet oil round it and letting it stand for a while. The oil will make its way down between the stopper and the bottle and free it, unless it is very securely wedged, in a very short time. Sometimes it is necessary to let it stand for some hours.

KATE.—To remove warts, wet and rub them several times a day in a strong solution of common washing soda. Mariatic acid applied daily will cause them to shrink and finally fall off. This acid should not be allowed to touch the surrounding flesh, but should be applied on the point of a wooden toothpick or sharpened match. If the wart presents a hard surface, the top should be pared off slightly so that the acid may penetrate.

TARQUIN.—A "stale-mate," in chess, is occasioned by getting your adversary's king in such a position, when not in check and when it is the only piece he can move, that he cannot move it without moving it into check. You will observe that this is altogether a different thing from check-mating your adversary, which consists in putting him in check in such a manner that he cannot move out of check; whereas a stale-mate consists in putting him in such a position that he must move into check.

ESTHER.—In your case, judging from your own statement, your stoutness is largely due to excessive beer drinking. Shun this beverage, and instead drink weak tea. Also, abstain from the use of bread, potatoes, pork, eels, salmon, butter, fat beef, and other farinaceous, saccharine, and oily substances. In place of these, indulge in lean meat, poultry, game, dry toast, green vegetables and fruit. The reductor of your superfluous flesh will be aided by long walks in the open air.

P. (TONNIBRIDGE).—Here is a recipe for spiced plums:—Wash and prick each plum with a needle; then weigh, and to every seven pounds of plums allow four pounds of sugar and one pint each of good cider vinegar and water. Heat the sugar, vinegar and water, skim well, and put in the plums with these spices tied loosely in a thin muslin bag—one tablespoonful of ground cinnamon, one of whole cloves, and two pieces of mace. Keep at the boiling point until the plums are tender, and seal while hot.

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